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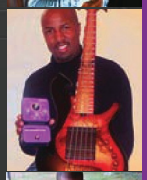

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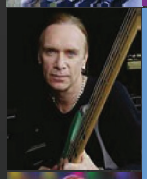

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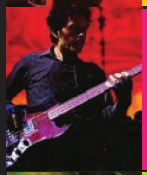

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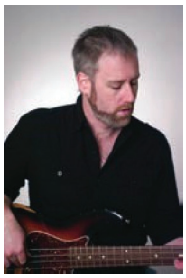
FROM THE EDITOR



Special Sauce

IN HIS "ARTISTRY" COLUMN IN THE SPRING '90 Premiere issue of Bass Player, Anthony Jackson famously referred to slapping as the "ketchup of the bass world." Of course, it wasn't the technique itself that Anthony was indicting; Jackson's clever metaphor was meant to point out that the practice of slapping, applied to an otherwise soulless, un-groovy bass line, was just about as tasty as a patty-free burger or a wiener-less dog.

I've gotta go with AJ on this one—in my years browsing music shops and working trade shows, I've heard so many "look-at-me" slap licks that the mere sight of an extended thumping thumb makes me want to dish out a slap-style licking of my own.

I know—I shouldn't be so harsh. After all, we can't all be like Marcus, Victor, Les, Larry, Flea, or any other of the slap masters profiled in this special issue. For me, what sets these players apart from the rest of us is their ability to use the technique as a special sauce they apply in dabs, careful not to overpower the musical ideas they are attempting to season.

I have to confess that sending this issue out to the masses makes me feel like a glutton for punishment; it probably means that next time I wander into a music store or walk the NAMM Show halls, I'll hear a few more slaps and pops than I otherwise would have. But if it means that those slappers are more educated, musically sensitive sort, I'm good with that. I'll keep my slap-downs to myself.

Have fun out there, and remember to keep the music meaty (don't smother the seitan). In other words, go easy on the sauce, and always strive to Dig Deeper!

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Editor Brian Fox, bfox@musicplayer.com
Senior Editor E. E. Bradman, ebradman@musicplayer.com
Consulting Editor Karl Coryat
Senior Contributing Editor Chris Jisi
Contributing Editor Bryan Beller
Staff Writer Jimmy Leslie

Art Director Paul Haggard
Assistant Art Director Damien Castaneda
Production Manager Amy Santana

Group Publisher Joe Perry
jperry@musicplayer.com, (770) 343-9978
Advertising Director Northwest, Midwest, Canada & New Business Development Greg Sutton
gsutton@musicplayer.com, (925) 425-9967
Advertising Director Southwest Albert Margolis
amargolis@musicplayer.com, (949) 582-2753
Advertising Director, East Coast & Europe Jeff Donnenwerth
jdonnenwerth@musicplayer.com, (770) 643-1425
Specialty Sales Adverting South Donovan Boyle
dboyle@musicplayer.com, (650) 238-0325
Specialty Sales Adverting North Contessa Abono
cabono@musicplayer.com, (650) 238-0296

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Sly & The Family Stone, Graham Central Station

Larry Graham

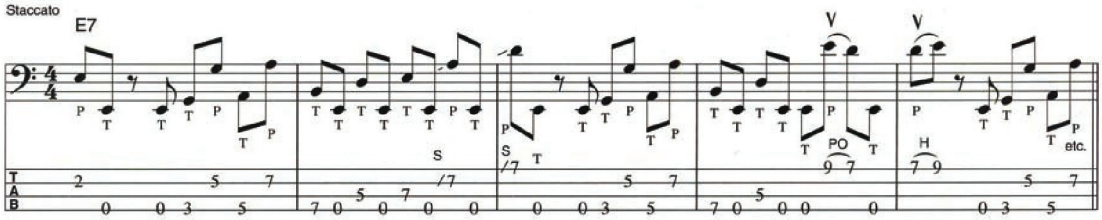
Can You Handle It?

THANKS TO THE FUNK FANS AT WARNER Bros. Records, one of the best places to experience or revisit Larry Graham's landmark bass playing is on the recently released retrospective *The Best of Larry Graham and Graham Central Station, Vol. 1*. (The liner notes promise a Volume 2.) The 11 cuts cover the nine-year period between 1974 and 1982; during the last three of those years, Graham was a solo artist, reaching #1 with his million-selling ballad, "One in a Million You." The rest of the tracks reveal Graham's diverse influences: blues and gospel; crooners ranging from Johnny Hartman to Ray Charles; such '50s phenoms as Elvis Presley and Chuck Berry; doo-wop music; and the '60s rock/funk impact of bandmate Sly Stone and guitar god Jimi Hendrix. Bass-wise, Graham thumps his way from the slippery, simple line on the slow-dance "Is It Love?" to the multi-bass-overdubbed, effects-drenched, furious funk of "Now D-U-Wanta Dance." The examples shown here are all taken from the *Best of* collection.

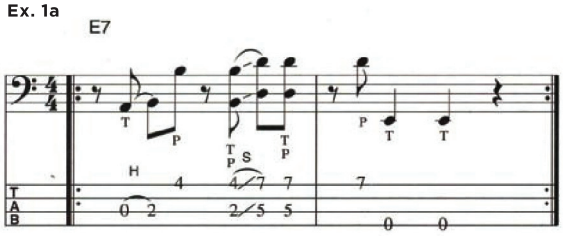
Example 1 is the opening five bars of "Hair"; BP readers can contrast this line with a transcription of T.M. Stevens's cover version, from his album *Boom!* [Polystar/Japan], which appeared in June '96. Graham's original part is grungier, with more variations in the line throughout the track. Of interest in bars 1–5 are the staccato feel and the classic Graham fill in bars 4–5. Also notable is the harmony, which (like so many funk songs) contains an ambiguous 3rd; here, the lone chord seems to fluctuate between *E7*, *Em7*, and *E7#9* tonalities. **Example 1a** occurs at the 3:07 mark and repeats eight times, forming a sort of second breakdown section before the final chorus. The two-bar phrase jumps out at you because Graham doesn't play on the *one* (the downbeat on the first beat of each bar). As for the unison octaves in bar 1, they may actually be the result of two bass parts overdubbed.

Example 2 presents Graham in a pure pop setting, with the four-bar intro/verse figure of "Can You Handle It?" Notice the chromatic notes in bar 2 and Larry's use

Ex. 1



Ex. 1a



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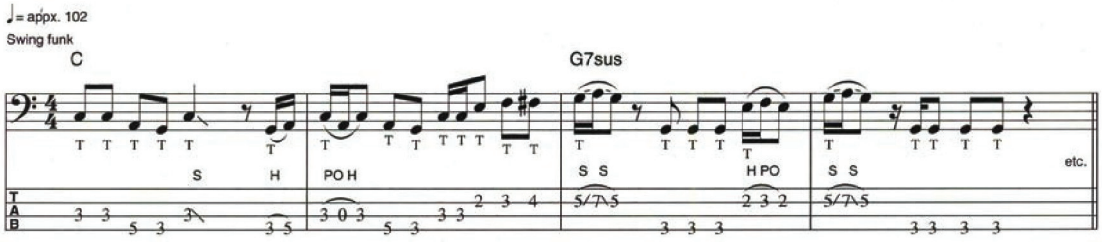
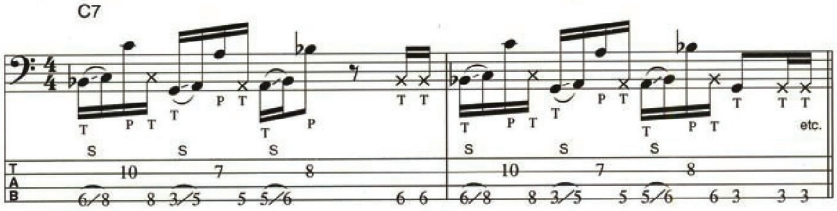
throughout of chord tones other than the root, 5th, and ♭7th. The line still has plenty of punch—especially in bars 3 and 4, which contain a cool "scoop" on their first beats. **Example 2a** shows the repeating two-bar phrase from the choruses. Graham gets down and dirty here, turning a simple climbing-octaves figure into a slick part, thanks to his trademark slides into the notes on the downbeats and ghost-note thumps on the upbeats.

Example 3 line occurs at 1:48 into "It's Alright" and alludes to Graham's Oakland/Tower Of Power-style 16th-note-based funk side. Note the opening slide from *G* to *A* and the vintage Graham octaves at the end of each eight-bar phrase. After this groove is introduced, the track rides out on it.

Ex. 2



Ex. 2a



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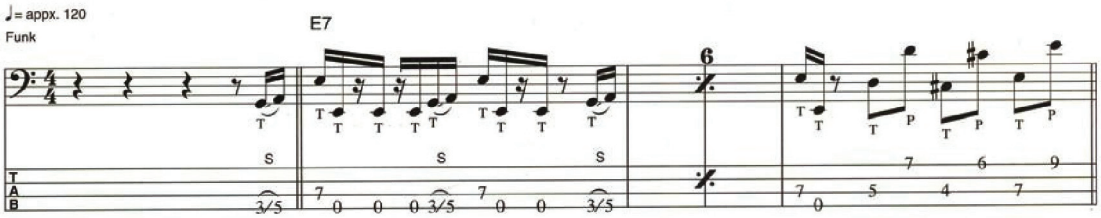

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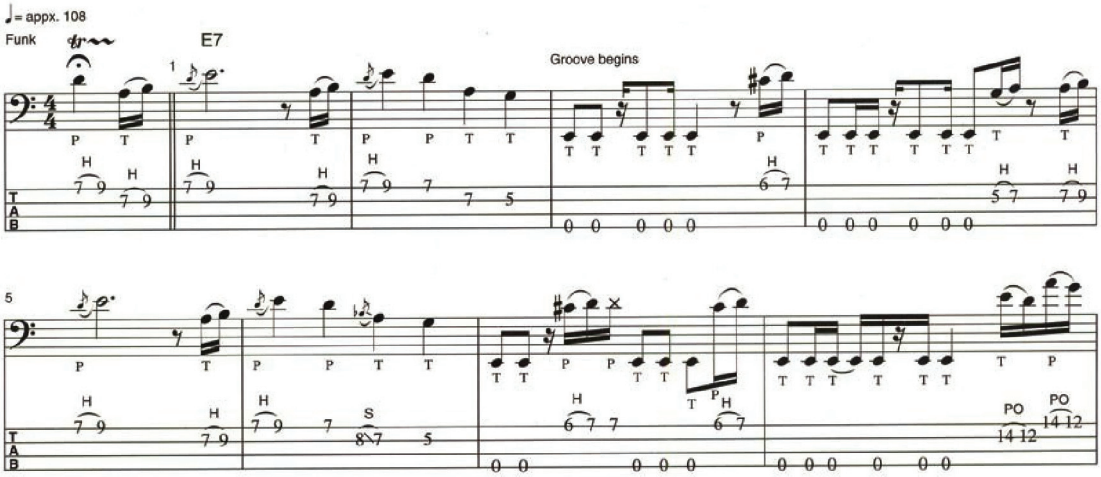
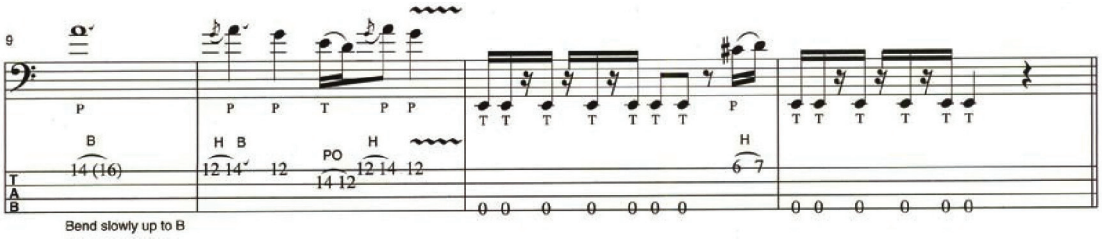


Example 4 shows the first 12 bars of "The Jam," Larry's '60s-inspired lead bass/slap bass duel. Following the opening trill and pickup notes, Graham provides two bars of melody followed by two bars of groove. Note the numerous hammer-ons, pull-offs, slides, bends, and other lead-melody devices. Among the hippest: the downward slide on beat *three* of bar 6; the slow whole-step bend from *A* up to *B* in bar 9; and the vicious vibrato on the last beat of bar 10. Jammin'!



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Larry Graham (lower right)

Dance To The Music!

WHEN YOU THINK OF LARRY GRAHAM'S bass playing with Sly & the Family Stone, what naturally comes to mind? Could it be that persistently swinging, short-long pulse, exemplified by the thumb-thumping, fuzz-bass-doubled "Dance to the Music" line from *Dance to the Music*? Could it be the one-note thump genius of "Everyday People"? Or the spanky octave slap [**Ex. 1**] from "Thank You Falettinme (Be Mice Elf)," both from *Greatest Hits*?

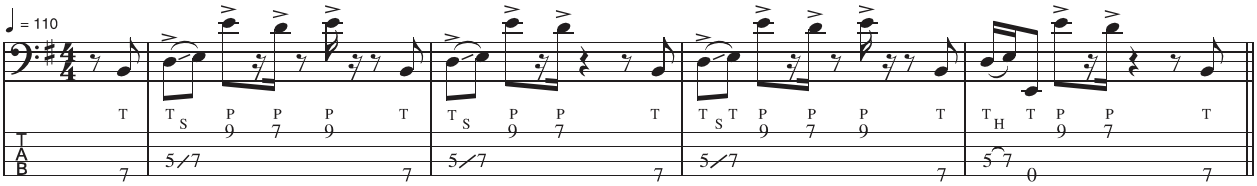
When Larry himself thinks of his bass work with Sly, only one thing comes to mind: "My mother, Dell Graham. I hadn't listened to any bass players when I took up bass with her when I was about 15, and I went straight from playing with her to playing with Sly. I considered myself a guitar player—my heroes were Clarence 'Gatemouth' Brown, Chuck Berry, and B.B. King—and I always thought I'd go back to guitar. So my only real bass influence was the way my mother carried bass lines with her left-hand on the piano. A lot of things she played went into my ear and my heart, and influenced me later as a bass player."

Though Larry rarely used the normal fingerstyle playing (which he calls "overhand"), there's much more to his lines than straightforward thumb-slaps. For example, when he played octaves on parts like the main verse line of "Are You Ready" [**Ex. 2**], he'd slide into both octave notes together, then maintain a bottom pulse while plucking syncopated finger-popped accents. "It's like two lines coming into one," says Larry. "That's the kind of thing you have to do as a drummer to keep the bass drum going with the snare. Remember, I played drums before I played guitar." Still, on the quick-tempo track "Underdog" (*A Whole New Thing*), one of the Family's first singles, Larry showed just how dexterous he could be with that thumb. Larry's busy line cruises through the lively verse changes [**Ex. 3**], in pointed contrast to the chorus's long-held dribble-fingered tremolo notes.

"I Wanna Take You Higher" (from *Stand*) has all the elements of a great Sly & the Family Stone song—high-energy rhythm, a recognizable riff, and vocal shout-outs from various band members—but it also encapsulates the quintessential elements of Larry's style. After the intro riff—where Larry's snarling fuzz tone gives apt voice to bar 2's sneering flatted 5th—the line goes into a short-long pulse [**Ex. 4a**]. But first, the rhythm gets weird, as anyone who's ever tried to work this line out knows. The secret's in bar 3's skipped beat, and knowing where to expect the vocals to come in—on the very next downbeat. How did the band come up with that? "Sometimes when you play live, things happen," Larry laughs. After the chorus, when most of the band drops out to sing "Boom-shaka-laka-laka," Larry reduces the short-long pulse to a one-string, ghost-filled bounce [**Ex. 4b**] that perfectly matches Greg Errico's up-down drumming. Listen closely and you'll hear multiple bass tracks in the recording, including the chorus's fuzz-bass swoops up to the ♭7.

What does Larry think when he listens to these albums now? "They sound just like yesterday to me. We try to keep this music alive, too. It's a part of me, and I love them just as much now as I did then." **SM**

Ex. 1



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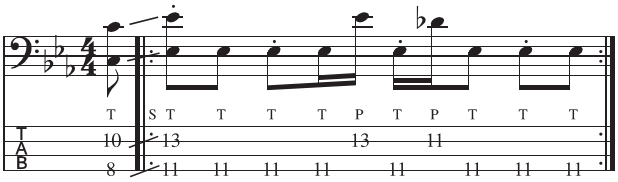

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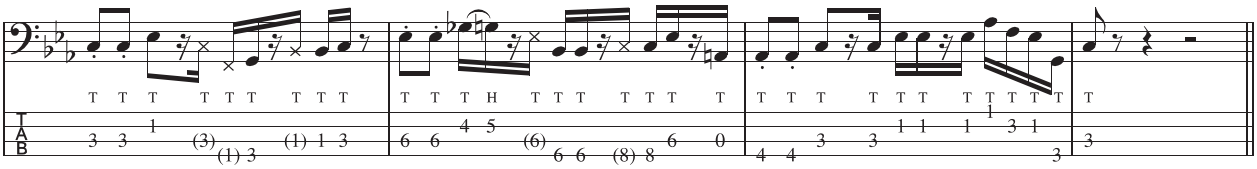

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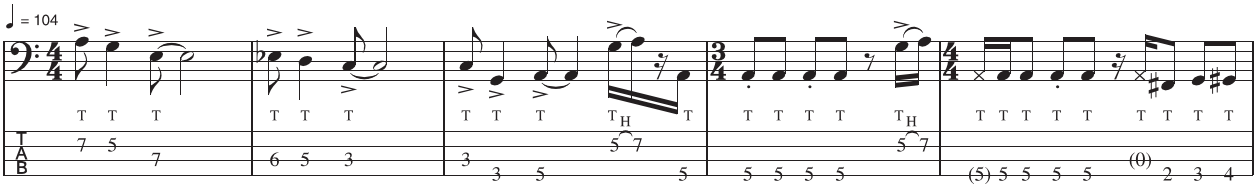
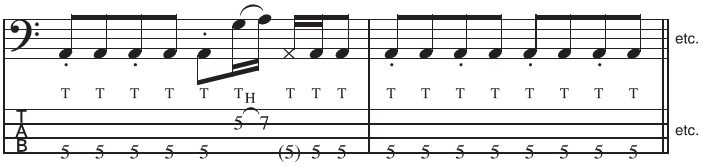
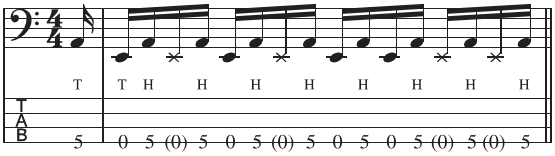




Ex. 4b



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Weather Report, Jeffrey Osborne, Sergio Mendes

Alphonso Johnson

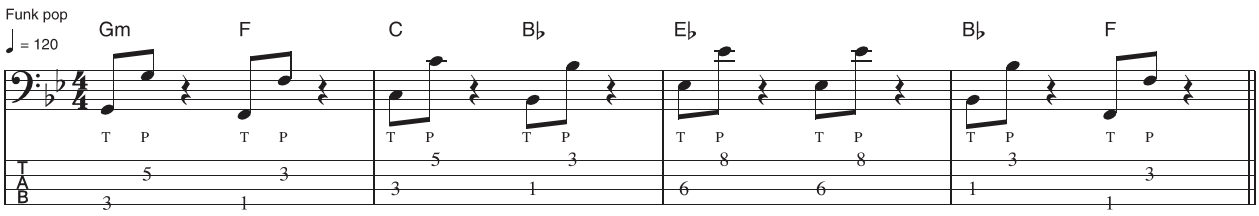
"Stay With Me Tonight"

SLAPPING, THUMBING, THUMPING— whatever you call it, by the early '80s, thumb-style bass was all the rage on Top 40 radio. But if we learned anything from slap pioneer Larry Graham's creations a decade earlier, it's that slapped parts are often simpler than they sound. With this in mind, a great part for beginner and intermediate slappers to dig into is Alphonso Johnson's bass line on Jeffrey Osborne's 1983 hit single "Stay With Me Tonight," from the singer's A&M album of the same name.

Johnson, a fusion-era innovator with Weather Report and others, spent some time on the L.A. session scene in the early '80s before beginning the next leg of his career as a member of Santana. He recalls, "Keyboardist Raymond Jones, who wrote 'Stay With Me Tonight,' sang me a bass line he had in mind, and he asked me to slap it, Louis Johnson-style. Having never learned how to slap properly, I struggled at first—but as soon as [drummer] Steve Ferrone started playing, everything just fell into place." Alphonso, who played his custom Rex Bogue 4-string with D'Addario roundwounds, recorded his bass direct and through a miked Ampeg amp at Lion's Share studio in Los Angeles.

Example 1 shows the basic octave moves needed to play the song's verse bass line. Start slowly and strive for evenness of attack between your downward thumb strikes and upward index-finger plucks, as you work up to the track's tempo (120 BPM). **Example 2** contains the song's verse section sub-hook, which also opens the track. Note the alternating rhythmic pattern of an eighth-note push into beat *one*, followed by a downbeat (usually with a pickup eighth-note) on beat *three*. Johnson relates, "The part Raymond sang to me had more pushes and ghost-notes, but I broke it down a bit by playing fewer notes and adding some downbeats, which worked better with Ferrone's part." He adds, "I strike the strings with my thumb right at the bottom of the fingerboard, but instead of pulling with my index finger for the pops, I pinch the strings between my thumb and index finger and pull out. That's my little quirk; a standard index pull is probably a better way to go." As for the feel, Alphonso advises, "Try to sit with Ferrone's drum beat in the center of the pocket. And really focus on the downbeats while you're playing the upbeats. A lot of times I hear students play syncopated parts, but they're not feeling where the downbeat is, so it all feels a little jerky." **SM**

Ex. 1



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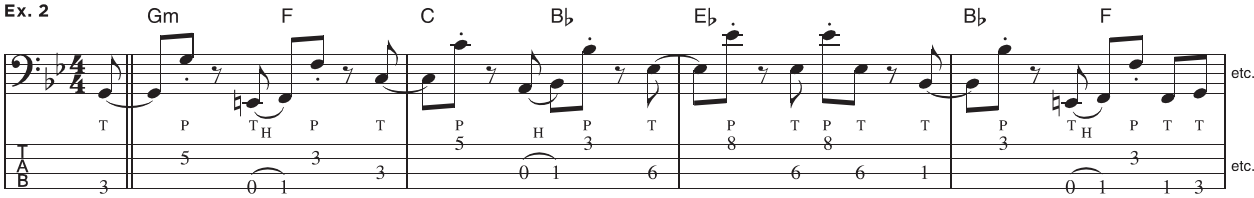

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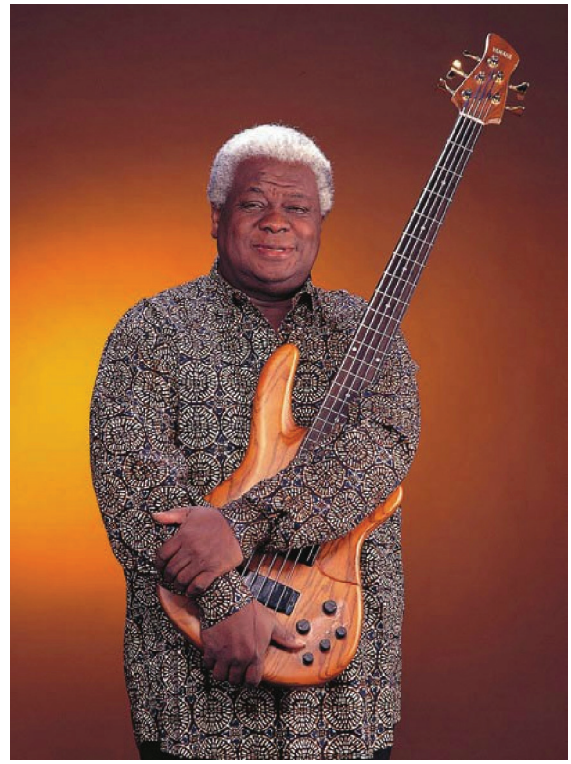
Al Jarreau, Quincy Jones, Michael Jackson



Abraham Laboriel

Slaps, Snaps & Strums

ONE OF BASSDOM'S MOST CREATIVE soloists is also a veteran of more than 3,000 sessions in a myriad of styles. He says simplest is best, yet he commands a mind-boggling array of mutant techniques and can create mighty grooves while palm-slamming his strings in the best thrash fashion or plucking them with elegant classical-guitar fingerings.

What ingredients go into Laboriel's various techniques? "A lot of it comes from wanting to imitate drummers," says Abe. "My thumb acts like a bass drum, and the other fingers are the snare. The *rasgueado* [flamenco-strumming] style comes from guitar—I discovered that's similar to a filigree-type thing drummers do on the hi-hat. So you have the bass drum, the snare, and the hi-hat."

"In my bass clinics, I tell people that all music goes *oom-pah-pah*," Abe continues. "The bass is the *oom*, and everything else is the *pah-pah*. So when you practice bass by itself, all you practice is a series of *ooms*, and there's a lot of space between them. You could say that when I was younger, I was incorporating the *pah-pah* into my thing."

Some describe Abraham Laboriel's style as "five-fingered," but he also uses two-, three-, and four-finger techniques, a unique thumb-snap method, percussive palm work, and various types of strumming. He often combines these with left-hand hammer-ons to produce complex rhythms, sometimes with double-stops, triple-stops, and beyond. Here are some of Abe's innovative techniques to try out; he demonstrates most of these in his instructional video *New Bass Concepts*:

The thumb snap Instead of the conventional downward-motion thumb slap, Abe uses the thumb to snap strings from beneath.

Thumb triplets A down-up motion—a downstroke with the thumb on a fretted note, then a hammer-on, then an upstroke on a fretted note.

Fingernail strum-roll This is the *rasgueado* guitar technique. The fingernails strike the string as the fingers are flipped one by one from the thumb, like shooting marbles. Abe does this from index finger to pinkie and pinkie to index finger. He likens the rapid-fire sound to a drum roll on a closed high hat.

Right-hand percussive slapping Just whap 'em with the flat of the hand. Usually used in combination with left-hand muting.

Two-hand percussive slapping Both hands get into the act. Not recommended for ballads.

Whole-hand strum Uses the fingernails for a flamenco-guitar sound.

Wes Montgomery-style octaves Combines left-hand muting with up-and-down thumb strums. **SM**

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Chaka Khan, Andrae Crouch, L.A. Mass Choir

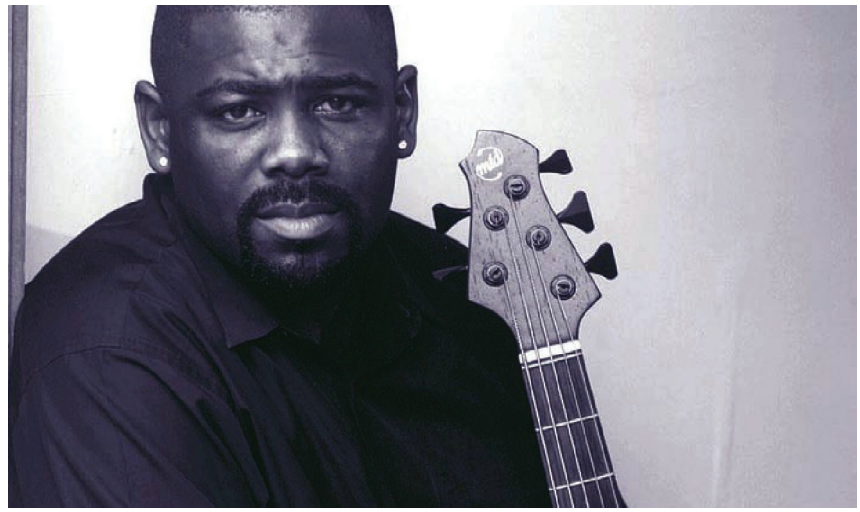
Andrew Gouche

A Gospel Style Study

IT HAPPENS AT SOME POINT IN EVERY gospel service—perhaps several times. It's the "shout music," that ecstatic section with the cut-time feel that gets the congregation on its feet in jubilant celebration. "It's spontaneous," says Andrew Gouché. "It happens when the spirit moves you."

So how do you typically get into or out of a shout music section? Gouché shows the way: "**Example 1** is a standard gospel riff that gets used as an intro, a breakdown, or an outro that leads back to the groove." Andrew begins by playing the first half straight, beginning to add some of his own stylistic flourishes in the second half. The dead-note pickup in bar 11 gives it a little goose, and the eighths in bar 13 help set up the turnaround. In bar 16, Andrew starts to break out with eighth-notes, letting everyone know that the shout vamp is going to get kicked up a few notches. "It's a busier approach," he says, "but it works."

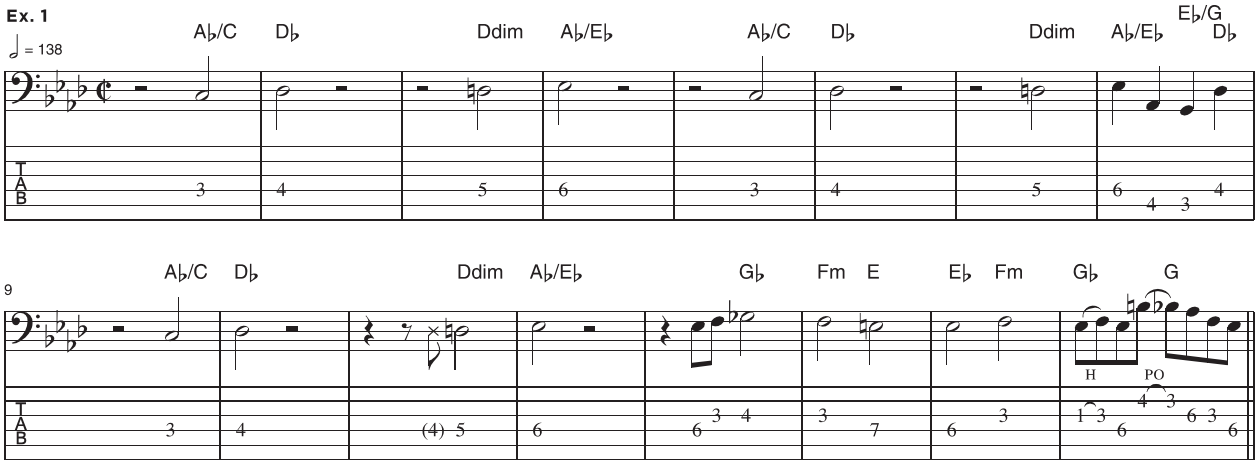
Example 2 is an insane slap figure Andrew uses to lead into the "shout music" vamp introduction. It's built from an *A♭* blues scale and cascades down using pull-offs (PO) and slides (S) to make it greasy. Note



how his hammer-ons (H) in bar 4 momentarily give the motif a reverse feel. In actual gig conditions, this would be tricky to pull off unless it was pre-arranged—or if you're the conductor like Andrew.

Gouché notes that Larry Graham was the reason he started to play bass, and the funk extravaganza in Ex. 3 has some very close ties to Graham's classic "Turn It Out" from Graham Central Station's *My Radio Sounds Good to Me* [Warner Bros., 1978]. The sliding double-stop motif is pure Larry, but Andrew cranks it up a notch by adding slapped "machine-gun" triplets and other tricks of the trade. Start by slowly practicing the triplet motif that starts bars 1, 3, and 5. It's not all that tricky—just straight back and forth between the thumb-slaps and pops. But

Ex. 1

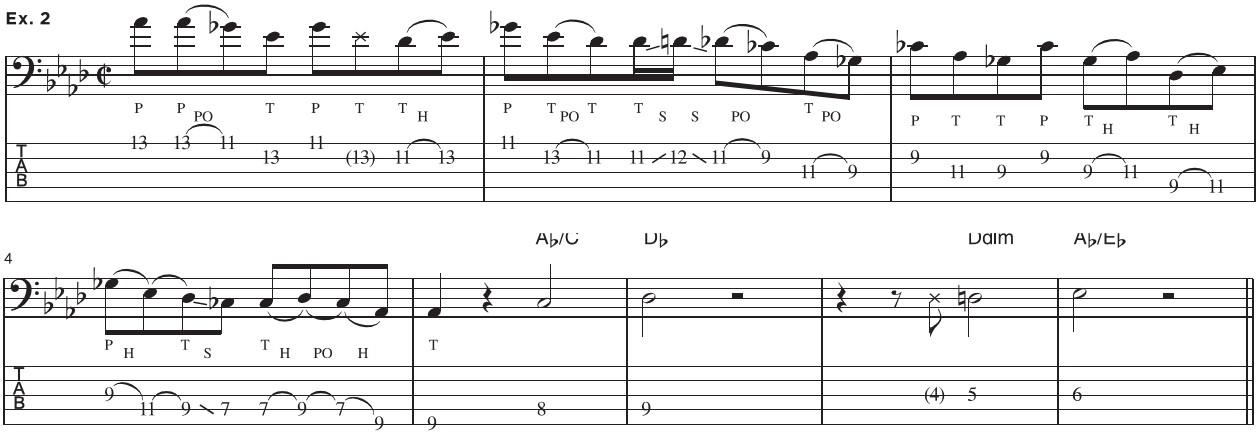


it is fast, and to make it sound real, you'll want to have the articulation clean. The double-stop slides are best played by strumming the two notes with the same finger you would use for popping. Bar 9 starts with a classic blues-guitar type lick: Play *G♭* and *C♭* with your 1st finger; then, while still holding the *G♭*, use your 2nd finger to hammer the *C♮* with your 1st. Beats *one* through *three* of bar 10 have a cool chromatic double-stop slide with a different articulation. Slide up to the *F* on the first eighth-note of beat *one*, add the high *A♭* with the strum technique, slide down a half-step, and then play the next double-stop on beat *two* with a thumb slap, angling your thumb slightly to get both notes. Bars 12 and 13 have a classic lead-in line, but slapping it gives it another vibe entirely.

When asked if a bass player could really get away with playing such an outrageously over-the-top solo in church, Andrew simply says, "I could!" before qualifying his answer: "It depends on how much freedom you get. Traditionally the piano player is the leader—but when I play, I'm usually in charge, so I get away with more."

Andrew Gouché's unique approach to gospel bass playing adds new depth to the term "inspirational music." Naturally inclined to play more actively than most, he fostered his approach by taking charge as musical director and molding the music around his playing style. In doing so he has raised the standards in what is expected of gospel bassists. **SM**

Ex. 2



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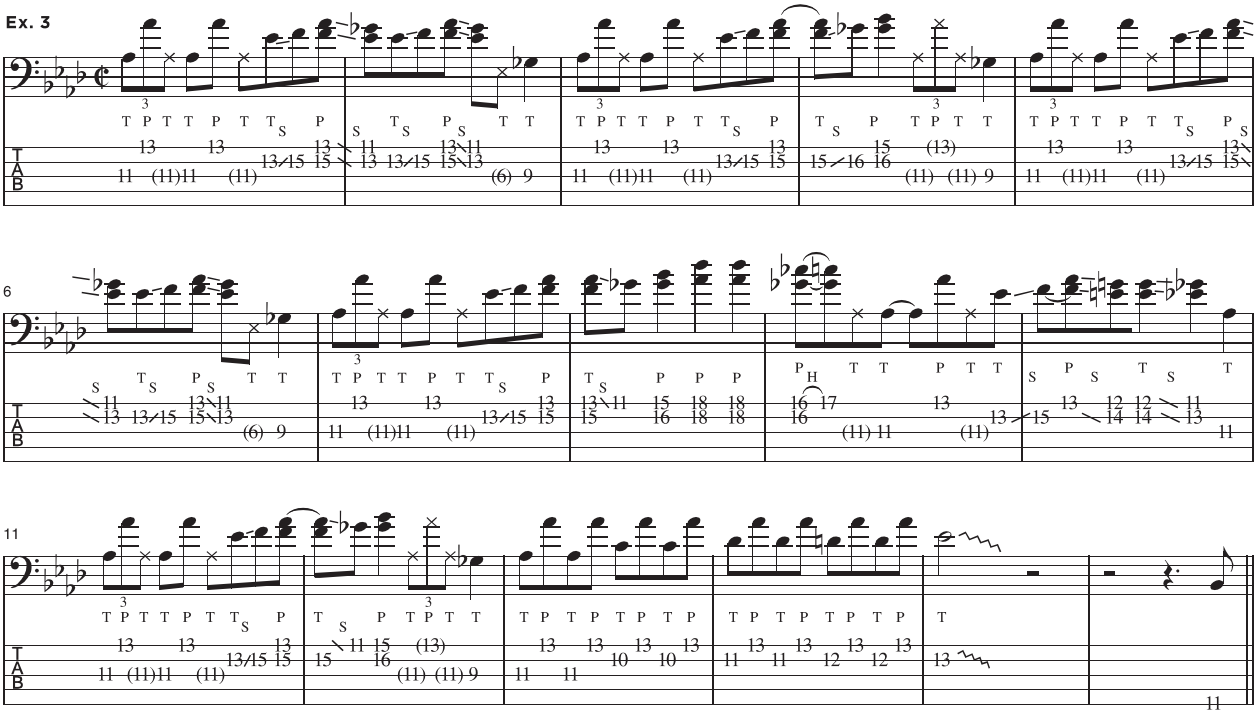


Aretha Franklin, Steely Dan

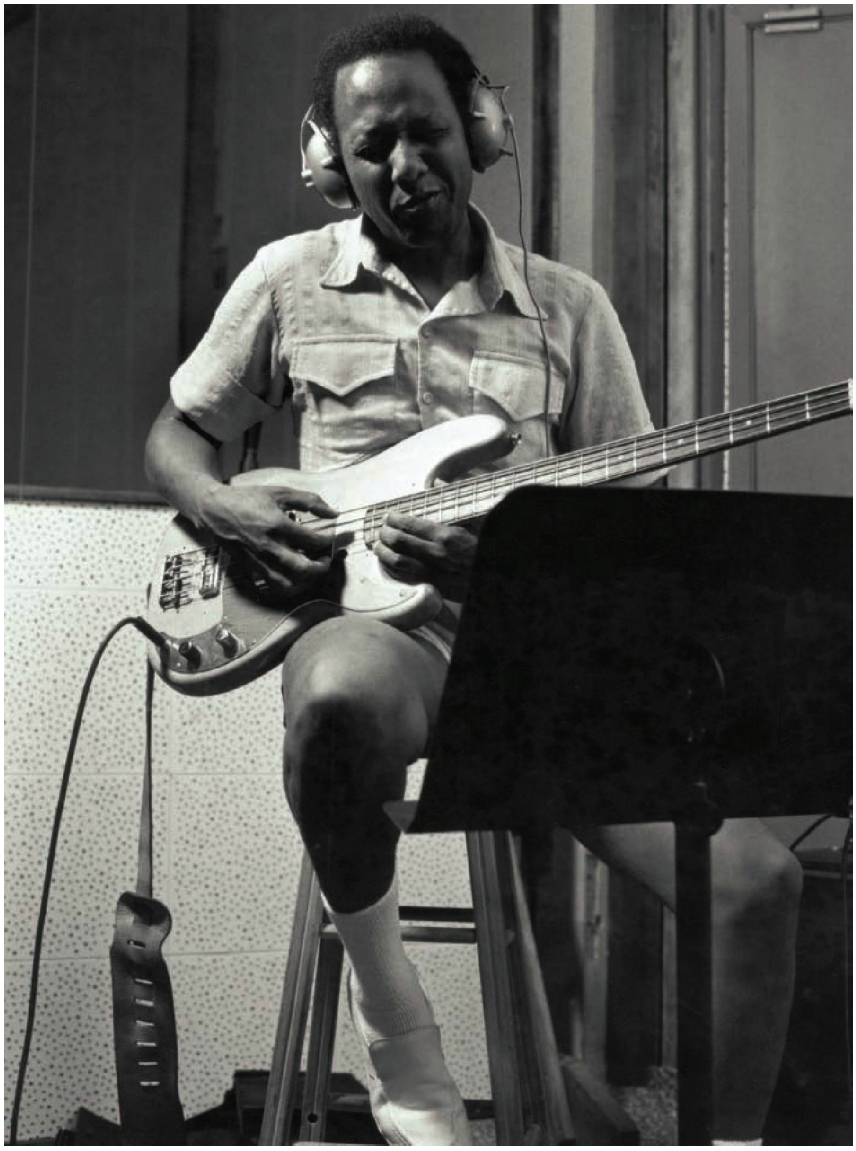
Chuck Rainey

"Rock Steady"

BEHOLD THE SUB-HOOK—THAT ingenious mix of melody and groove in very few notes, a simple phrase that both drives and defines a song to everyone within earshot. For all of the finely crafted, complex parts put forth by bass guitar's founding fathers, a good sub-hook was never far away. James Jamerson had "Shotgun." Paul McCartney had "Come Together." Few, however, were funkier than Chuck Rainey's contribution to the form, Aretha Franklin's 1971 Top Ten single "Rock Steady," from *Young, Gifted and Black* [Atlantic/Rhino].

Firmly established as New York's first-call session bassist, Rainey was soon to be a member of Franklin's crack touring band when his Atlantic Records rhythm team was brought down to Miami's Criteria Studios to cut tracks with the Queen of Soul in the fall of 1970. Franklin, who wrote the song and provided a scratch vocal and piano part, was present at the morning session along with Bernard Purdie on drums, Cornell Dupree on guitar, Richard Tee on organ, and Rainey. (Franklin's final vocal, the backup vocalists, and the horn section would all be added later.) Chuck plucked his '57 Fender Precision–sunburst with a rosewood board–keeping the volume full up and the tone knob a quarter of the way open. His strings were La Bella flats, and he bypassed his favored Ampeg B-15 to record direct only. Producer Arif Mardin eventually wrote out charts, but none were really needed for the simple two-chord, two-section ditty about, *ahem*, jumping into your car and "taking a ride."

After a few quick run-throughs, engineer Gene Paul (who was responsible for Rainey's massive bass presence in the mix), said, "Let's put one down so we can hear what it sounds like." Rainey, Purdie, Dupree, and Tee had cut many a side together, and in a testament to their creative powers, the foursome issued a slamming first take. The diligent production team of Mardin, Jerry Wexler, and Tom Dowd had the musicians rework and re-record the song for the next three or four hours before it was finally realized that the first pass was perfection. It was also a virtual glossary of Rainey's signature moves.



Chuck (center) with Aretha Franklin

The track begins with Purdie's pickup into four bars of hi-hat and organ. Underneath, Rainey does percussive slides up the *G* string, often mistaken for organ or percussion. Chuck explains, "It's something I did on a lot of records. They put some echo on it."

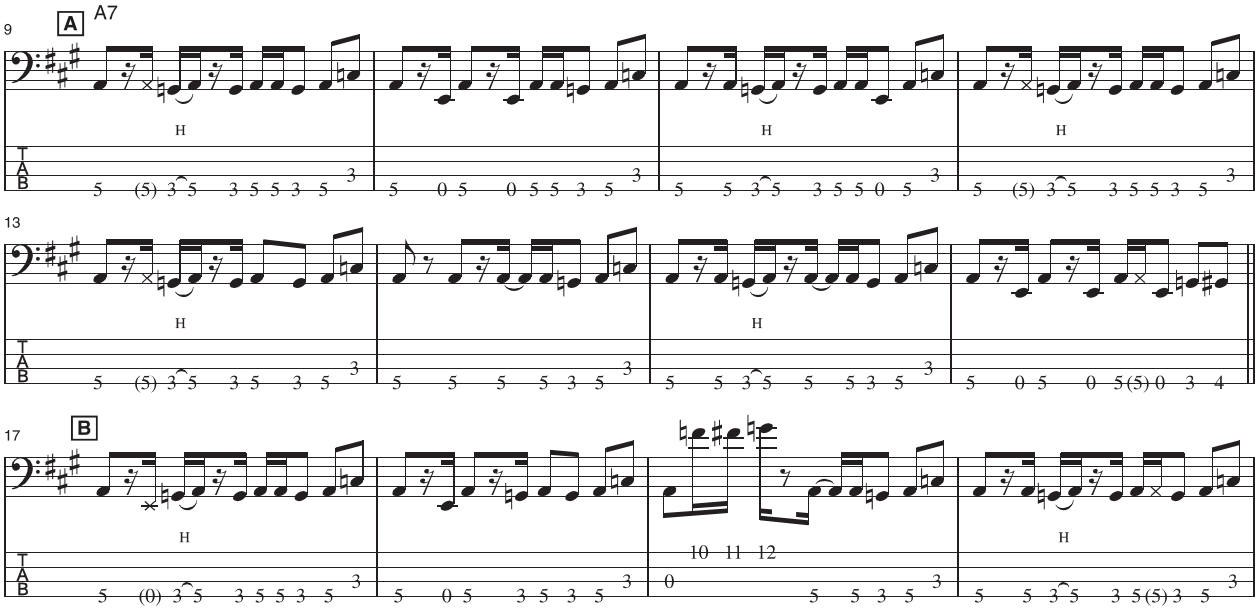
By the first verse [**Ex. 1**], Rainey and crew are in full-on groove mode. He recalls, "It's something that just came to me from what Bernard was playing, and Cornell knew us so well, he jumped right in with a complementary part. I probably wasn't completely conscious of this in the moment, but my concept seemed to be that the back half of the one-bar phrase—beats *three* and *four*—would be the repeated-motif part of the line, and the first two beats would be more loosely improvised."

Another key is that Chuck patted the part to give it a weightier, broader sound. "Patting was something I was using on many dates back then, but this being a hit record, it stood out more. I started doing it in 1962, when I first came to New York and I was working with [legendary rock organist] Bill Doggett. Patting was a way to simulate his left-hand pats on the Hammond organ through the Leslie speaker, on tunes like 'Honky Tonk.'" He continues, "I would hold my right arm straight down toward the floor and hit the heel of my hand on the top rounded edge of the bass; my fingers would recoil and I would catch the *E* string with my index and middle fingers. It was like a [drummer's] flam—I'd feel the groove in the heel and the fingers would follow on the string an instant later. I also used a lot of hammer-ons to give the part a gritty, grunting sound."

From the second verse [Letter **B**] on, Rainey continues to vary the patted phrase, adding some of his trademark upper-register fills. "Whenever I had an open string, I was reaching up and doing that, like on Roberta Flack's 'Reverend Lee' [from *Chapter Two*, Atlantic, 1970]. Here, what's interesting is I normally would have played the fill at the end of the bar, but I had to play it at the beginning of the bar in order to leave the motif in place."

To nail the part, Rainey advises, "Check out the feel and the interplay. It's dance music. In those days people danced together, so we played together. You can boil the whole groove down to a swampy drum cadence, so listen for that and then sit down right in the pocket and go with the flow." He allows, "If you don't feel comfortable patting, try thumb-slapping the line. That's what I do now when I play it on a 5-string. Either way, it remains a special song for me." **SM**

Ex. 1



"Rock Steady" by Aretha Franklin. © 1970 Springtime Music, Inc. All rights reserved.

Sugar Hill Gang, Living Colour

Doug Wimbish

In-Your-Face Bass

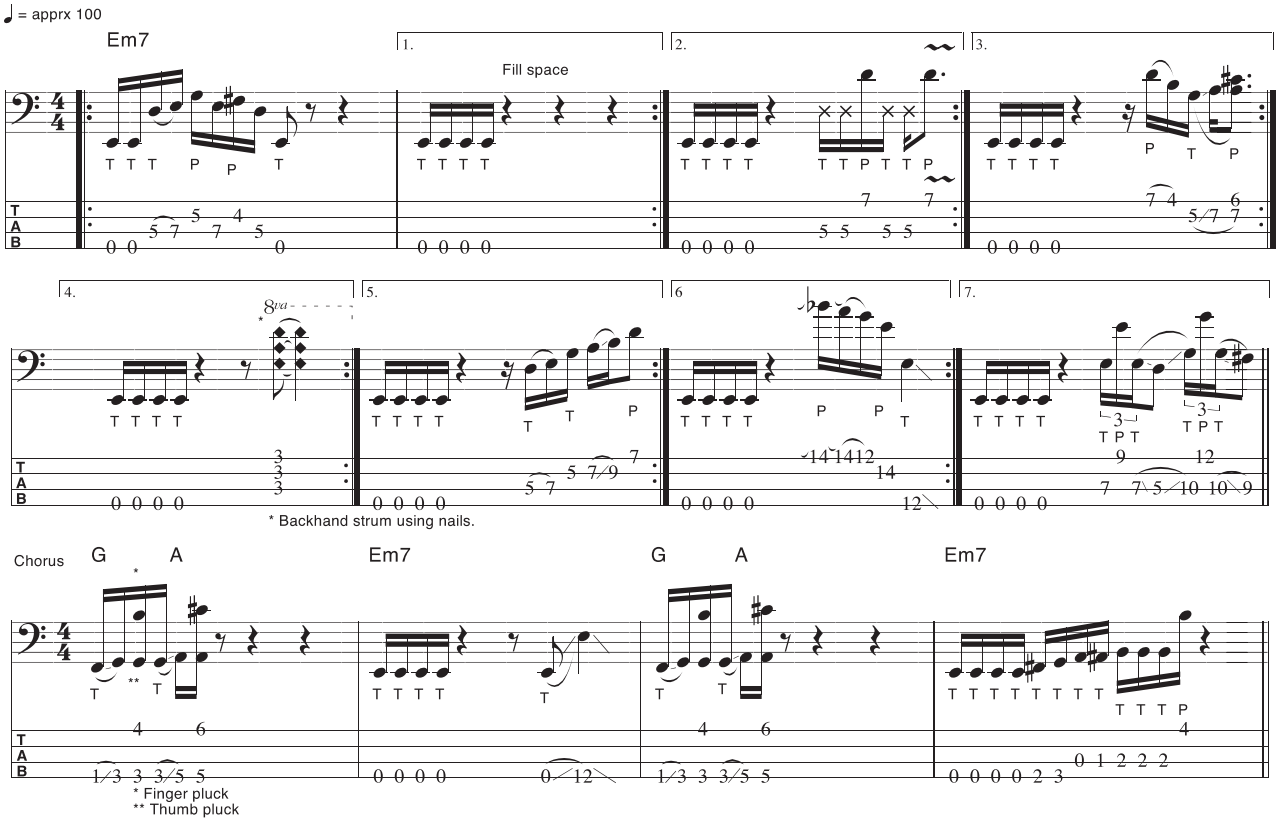
WHEN GRANDMASTER MELLE MEL rapped the immortal phrase "The bass is in your face," he was referring to the imposing lines of Doug Wimbish. In 1979, Wimbish—along with guitarist Skip McDonald and drummer Keith LeBlanc—formed the house rhythm section for the pioneering rap/hip-hop label Sugar Hill. Over the next five years, the trio unleashed a torrent of menacing, machine-mocking grooves behind such artists as Melle Mel, the Sugar Hill Gang, Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five, Spoonie Gee, and the Sequence.

Working around the clock at Sugar Hill's two studios in Englewood, New Jersey, Wimbish, McDonald, and LeBlanc—who traveled from their home base near Hartford, Connecticut—played on and arranged (and often wrote, produced, and engineered) more than 30 different artists from 1979 through '85. The Sugar Hill house band functioned in the same way as Motown's legendary Funk Brothers. "Like Motown's musicians," explains Wimbish, "we were there at the dawn of a new musical form, so there were no rules or traditions to follow. As a result, we had the freedom to experiment and be completely creative using our backgrounds in R&B, jazz, and rock."

Given McDonald's sparse, percussive guitar punctuations and LeBlanc's preference for the lower half of his kit (he helped to pioneer the use of steady 16ths on the kick drum), Wimbish himself assumed a James Jamerson-like role. On track after track, his forward-mixed bass can be heard covering the entire frequency range while filling the open spaces between lyrics with a wicked assortment of slaps, pops, taps, harmonics, and overdriven squeals—all locked so deeply into the groove it was often unclear what instrument or machine was producing the sounds.

"New York, New York," a classic Grand-

Ex. 1



"New York New York" by Melvin Glover, Sylvia Robinson, Edward Fletcher & Reggie Griffin. Transcription by Chris Jisi & Doug Wimbish.
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master Flash and the Furious Five track from 1983, showcases Wimbish's work in both an organic and more mechanized setting [**Ex. 1**]. On it, Doug plucked his Sugar Hill workhorse: a blond '72 maple-neck Jazz Bass with a Badass bridge, Bartolini pickups, and Rotosound strings. Wimbish's basses were always recorded direct into old tube mike preamps at the Hill's twin studios. The occasional effect came from the studio's rack gear or an early Scholz Rockman unit. (Though Doug always experimented with effects, it wasn't until after his Sugar Hill days that he became the effects wizard he is today.)

"The music was written by Reggie Griffin, who laid down a bass part with his Fender Mustang," Wimbish explains. "I was then given the part to make my own, which I did by re-interpreting the phrasing and adding the fills." Example 1 contains the repeated two-bar slapped phrase that

occurs in the song's verse sections. Note the fill space on the last three beats of bar 2. Each successive repeat of bar 2 contains a fill that Wimbish plays during the seven-and-a-half-minute song. Of note is the slick lick in the third ending, which lands on an implied *A7* chord, and the sextuplet slap in the seventh ending, which was actually flown in from an alternate take. Example 2 shows the four-bar chorus figure; bars 1 and 3 boast a cool use of tenths. The last three beats of bar 2 function more or less to fill space; check out the trademark Wimbish up-and-down slide. Bar 4 features a slamming phrase-ending lick.

Summing up his Sugar Hill days, Doug says, "Like any house band, we were underpaid in general and under-credited as writers—but I'm not bitter at all. I'm proud to have been around at the dawn of rap and hip-hop, and to have contributed to a music that's still going strong." **SM**

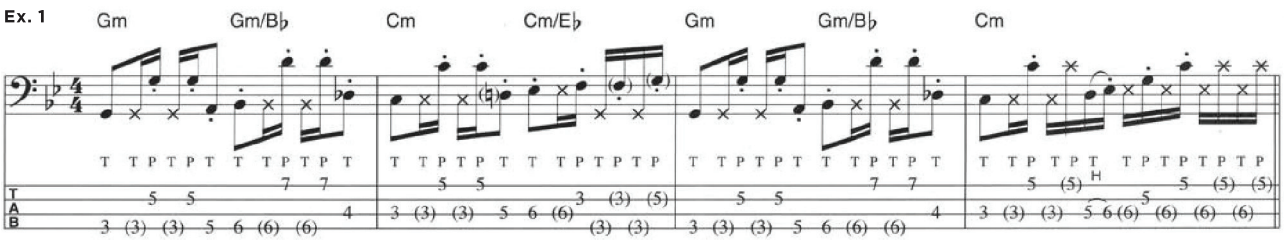
Red Hot Chili Peppers

Flea

"Aeroplane"

"AEROPLANE," THE SECOND TUNE from the Red Hot Chili Peppers album *One Hot Minute* [Warner Bros., 1995], features a different Flea feel in each of its three main sections: chorus, verse, and bass-and-drums breakdown. To help you reach cruising altitude faster, here are a few helpful tips from the pilot himself: "Be loose, and feel the funk. The bass line really opens up in the chorus, and it tightens up in the verse. Get inside the kick drum and live there."

Example 1 (0:49–0:59) incorporates a standard funk pattern using thumbstyle techniques centered around octaves in *G*, then tenths in *B♭* (both in bar 1). Approaching *C* from one semi-tone above (*D♭*) gives a jazzy, chromatic sound at the end of bar 1. The offbeats in bar 4 add spice; also note all the ghosted and muted notes, which add to the part's percussiveness. **SM**



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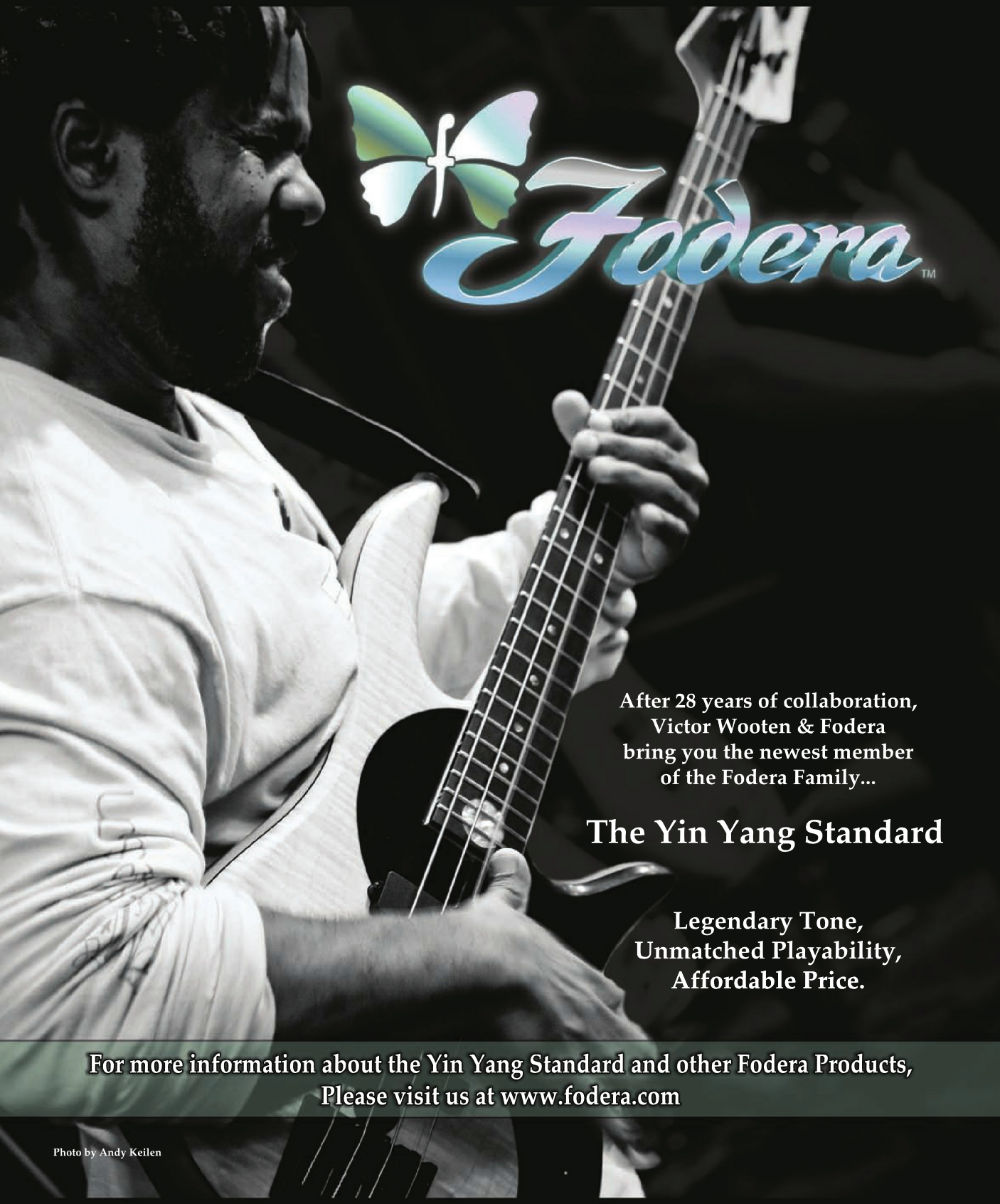
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The Brothers Johnson

Louis Johnson

"Stomp!"

IN-YOUR-FACE-BASS AT THE TOP OF the charts is rare indeed, yet it was a regular occurrence during the late-'70s/early-'80s heyday of Louis "Thunder Thumbs" Johnson. Best known to bassists as the arching, steely bridge between slap pioneer Larry Graham and modern-day thump kings like Marcus Miller and Victor Wooten, Johnson—as "discovered" by Quincy Jones—had the musical midas touch. He capped a potent session run by playing on virtually every track of Michael Jackson's landmark albums, *Off the Wall* and *Thriller*. Simultaneously, with guitarist/brother George, he formed the Brothers Johnson, issuing such hits as "Strawberry Letter 23," "I'll Be Good to You," and "Stomp!" The latter was the duo's biggest hit, reaching No. 1 on the R&B and dance charts, and No.3 on the pop charts. Infectious and multi-sectioned, the dance hit clocked in at 6:20 on the *Light Up the Night* LP, with over two minutes shaved off for radio. But both versions had a most pleasantly surprising centerpiece: a slap solo (although cut from 16 to 8 bars for radio).

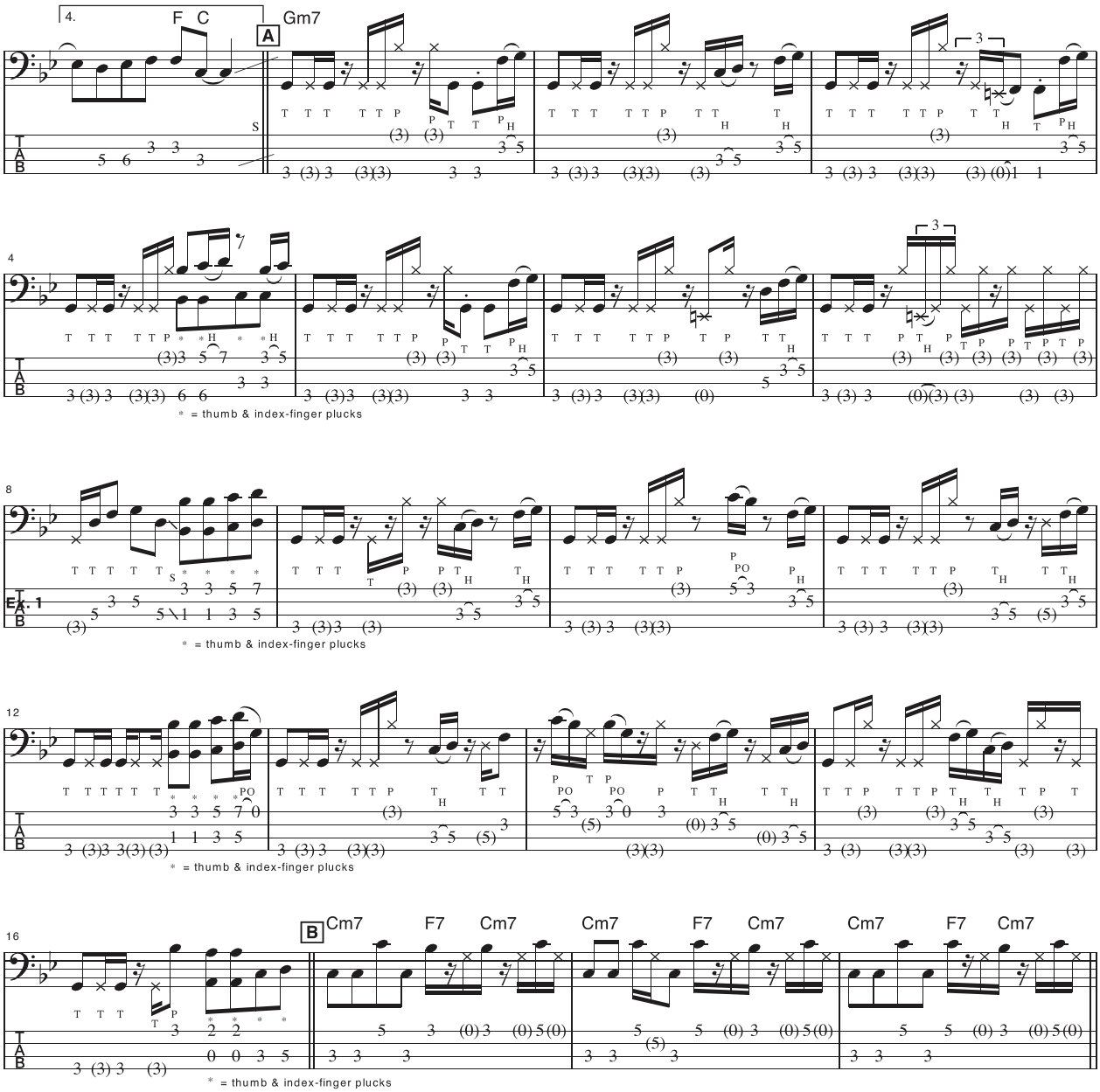
Johnson's "Stomp!" path actually began on Olvera Street, in his native downtown Los Angeles, where he was born in April 1955. At six years old, he saw and heard a *guitarron* acoustic bass in the mariachi bands that lined the famed Mexican-themed walkway, and got hooked on the big sound. Coming from guitar, Johnson got into slapping organically, first by plucking the bass strings with his thumb and then "trying to find the little clicks and pops I got when I strummed chords on the guitar." This led to slapping and popping the standard way, as well as other devices, like palm pats and muted strums. When Louis and George got their first big break, joining Billy Preston's band in 1972, Louis was told he sounded like Larry Graham. He recalls, "I hadn't even heard of Larry yet, my influences were Ray Brown and James Jamerson." Quincy Jones came upon a Johnson brothers demo a few years later, paving the way for their 1976 album debut, *Look Out for #1*.

The late-1979 session for "Stomp!," from the fourth and best-charting Brothers Johnson album, took place at A&M Studios in Los Angeles. Recalls Louis, "I started writing the song on bass first and then guitar at my home studio. Next, Quincy had Rod Temperton, George, and my wife, Valerie, help out with some melodies and lyrics; Jerry Hey did the horn and string arrangements." He adds, "The song is about people dancing and stomping and having a good time partying. Notes Louis, "We had it in about two takes, and I made no punches or fixes; the funk was there as soon as we hit it." Johnson used a natural Music Man StingRay (which he helped design), and strung it with new D'Addario roundwounds. His bass recorded his bass direct and through a miked and baffled Fender Bassman amp.

Anchored by four-on-the-floor kick drum, the track launches with an extended intro based on the chorus changes. Johnson provides roots for the chord hits in the first eight measures, and adds some rhythmic motion to the next eight. When the full drum kit enters, Louis lets loose with a funky, octave-switching two-bar phrase that sets up—and continues as—the first verse. Johnson's finger plucking technique, alternating index and middle fingers, is notable. He relates, "I used fingers at first because Quincy, my musical mentor and teacher, taught me when you create a song you don't start out at level ten and leave yourself with nowhere to go; you start simple, build to a highpoint, and then go back down slowly. I wanted to tell a musical story in 'Stomp!,' and build up to the thumping. That's how I wrote 'Land of Ladies' and a lot of other Brothers Johnson tracks."

With a nudge on the board, legendary Quincy Jones engineer Bruce Swedien pumps up Johnson's bass for his slap solo. Generally, Johnson starts each measure with a similar rhythmic figure, varying its ending on beats *three* and *four*. Dig his left-hand-aided triplets in bars 3 and 7, and his walk-ups at the end of 4, 8, 12, and 16—usually with octaves or similar notes (4) added on top. Louis addresses his basic slap approach: "It's all about the rhythmic counterpoint between the right and left hands. I'll tend to think about two or three traditional folk rhythms at once, maybe an African-type rhythm on the *one* and the downbeats, which is key in funk, then, say, a Native American rhythm over that, and maybe a Japanese rhythm on top [*sings all three*]. It's sort of like having a bass, mid, and treble going on in the rhythm."

Louis, who has been known to break both string and speaker with his Bruce Lee-inspired intensity on the fingerboard, advises, "Just get into the part and really feel it. I've always said, when I play, I become the bass; I'm no longer Louis Johnson, I *am* the bass—so the bass is in trouble!" **SM**



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Primus

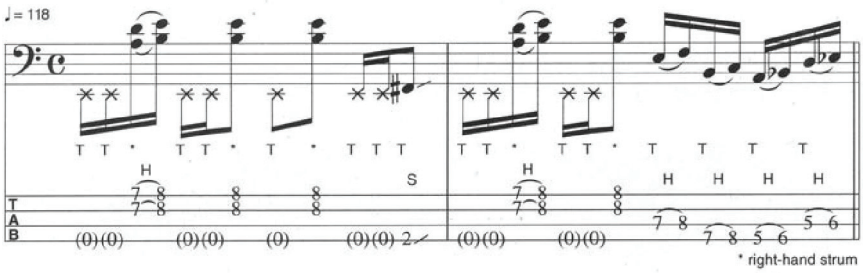
Les Claypool

Ostinatos From Hell

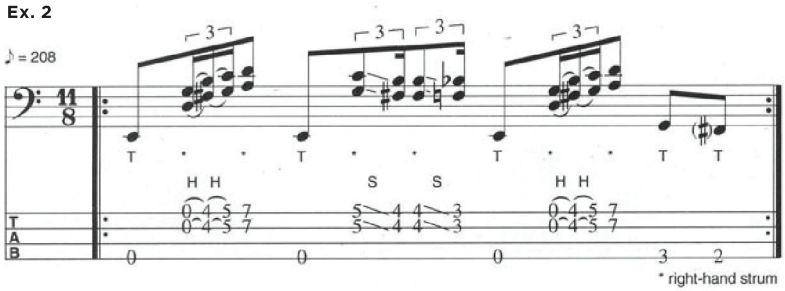
LES CLAYPOOL'S BASS LINES TEND to repeat in one- or two-bar phrases, with only small variations from measure to measure. His parts feature lots of muted, thumbed, popped, and strummed notes, and he favors barred fourths and root-5th-octave chords.

Example 1, from "Pudding Time" (*Frizzle Fry*), is a fairly simple introduction to Claypooldom. Mute the *E* string with a left-hand finger or thumb, barre the top notes with your index finger, and strum the top two strings with your right-hand fingernails in a quick, downward motion. For the slide, have your left hand moving as you slap the string; that way, the slide will begin on an indefinite pitch.

Ex. 1



Ex. 2



The 11/8 time signature of "Eleven" from *Sailing the Seas of Cheese* can be very difficult to count. But in this tune, the beats are strongly grouped in an easy-to-grasp way: one-two-three, one-two-three, one-two-three, one-two. (That's why the eighth-notes are grouped as such in the notation.) **Example 2** illustrates the repeating pattern. The strums should be done strongly, to emphasize the beats they fall on (the "pa-pa" of the "oom-pa-pa" feel); the hammered notes should be merely embellishments. For the slides, fret the *D* string with your middle finger and the *G* string with your ring finger.

It's possible to play **Ex. 3** from *Sailing*'s "Jerry was a Race Car Driver" on a fretted 4-string by moving all the notes down an octave, but it's harder to execute and doesn't sound as good. In this line, none of the notes is plucked—they're all either hammered or pulled off. The first *A*♭, for

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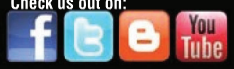

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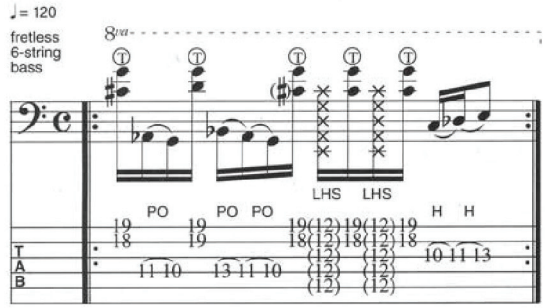
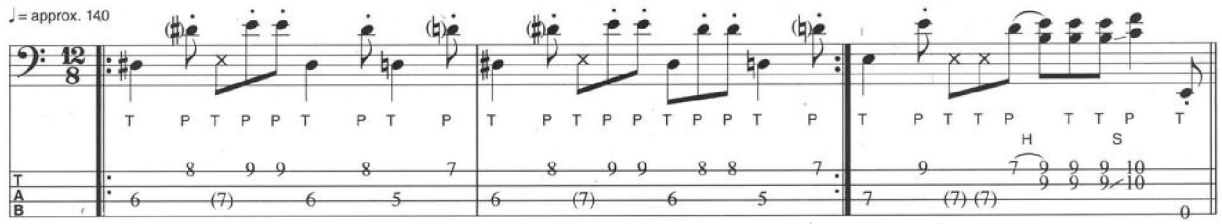
Ex. 3



instance, is played simply by hammering the note onto the fretboard (as are the *B*♭ on two and the *C* on four). The ghost notes are produced simply by slapping the left hand down on the strings without letting any of the actual notes sound.

Example 4 is from "Welcome to This World," from 1993's *Pork Soda*. It's a fine slapping exercise, although Les refers to the song as "a total jackoff tune." The transcription is approximate; any of the notes may be muted at different times, and the rhythm can be improvised for variety. Bar 3 serves as an ending figure. The *B* on beat seven is not plucked but produced as a byproduct of the *D* to *E* hammer-on. Likewise, the *C* on beat ten is a byproduct of the move to the 10th fret for the popped *F*. To play it cleanly, keep your finger pressed firmly against the fingerboard and don't slide up to the 10th fret until just before you pop the *F*. Hot corn! **SM**

Ex. 4



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Miles Davis, Luther Vandross, David Sanborn

Marcus Miller

The Man With The Golden Thumb

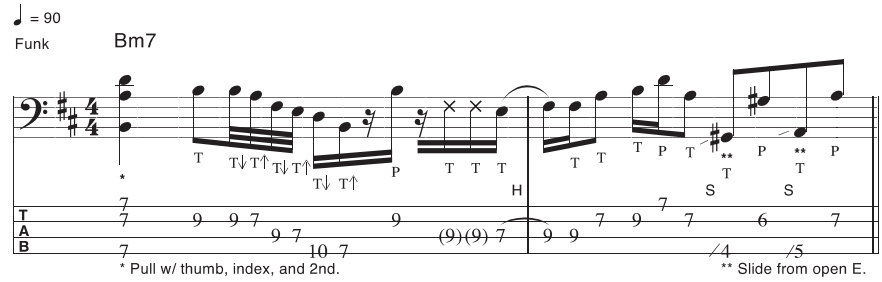
MARCUS MILLER'S *M2* [3 DEUCES, 2001] finds the seasoned slapper doling out everything from 32nd-notes and swung sextuplets to laid-back fretless melodies and whole-notes on upright—all without ever resorting to "throwaway" notes or disturbing the groove. **Example 1** contains two bars of the opening groove figure from "Power."

"'Power'" is built around the opening bass lick," says Marcus. "Someone told me recently, 'Whenever you play, you sound hungry.' I always think of that when I play this tune because it has that hungry, New York-rooted sound." Note the three-finger popped chord on beat *one*, the double-thumbed 32nd-note figure in beat *two*, and the accentuated, Larry Graham-style slides and walk-up at the end of bar 2. Says Marcus, "I was looking for a key that would give me a different slap sound than the usual *E* or *A*, and *B* worked out well—especially being able to drop down for the octave walk-ups."

Miller's trademark Fender Jazz Bass is in full effect on the opening groove of "Cousin John" [**Ex. 2**], where he tunes his *E* string down a half-step to *E*♭. "That bass line came out of jamming with [drummer] Poogie Bell, who played an interesting Latin/Go-Go kind of beat," says Marcus. "The chord changes recall what we were doing with Miles in the mid-'80s *Amandla* period. In bar 1 I play the last 16th of beats *two*, *three*, and *four* on a different string than the three preceding 16ths, so you have to hammer them strongly with your left hand to get the note to sound."

Examples 3a and 3b show "Nikki's Groove," also from *M2*. Example 3a contains the slapped breakdown melody at 0:07, rife with expressive inflections. "I needed a track with a bright sound and tonality to balance all the darker-sounding material," offers Marcus. "The melody had been in my head for a long time, and I figured the only way to get it out was to record it and put it in someone else's head!" At 1:59 [Ex. 3b], Miller turns up the rhythmic juice in his solo. He uses a cool, descending double-thumb run in bar 1 and brisk, board-scaling double-triplets in bar 3. **SM**

Ex. 1



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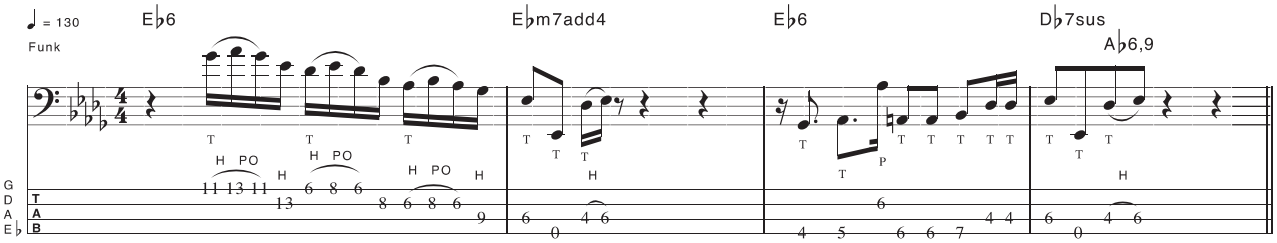
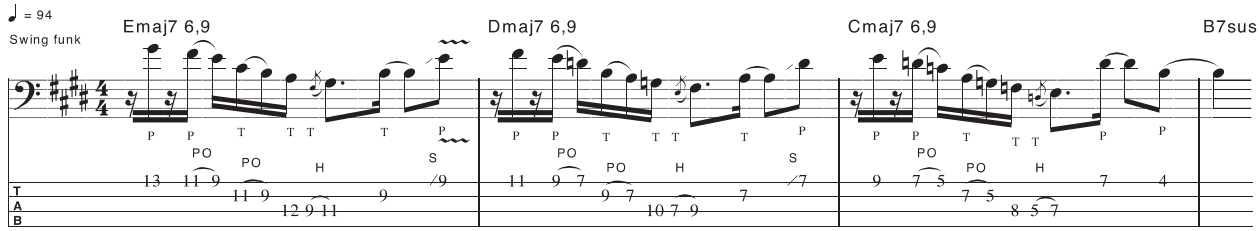
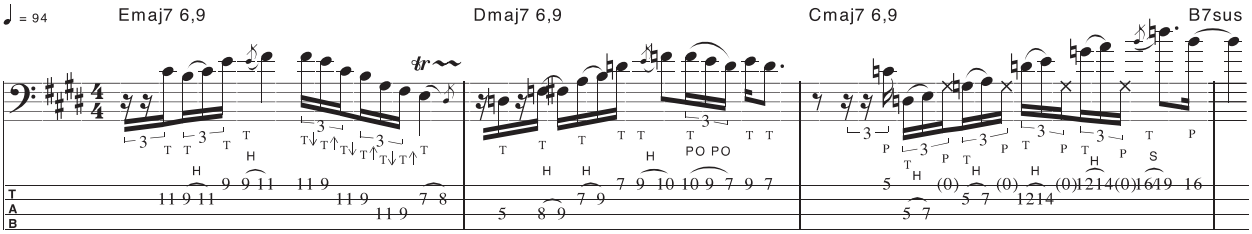


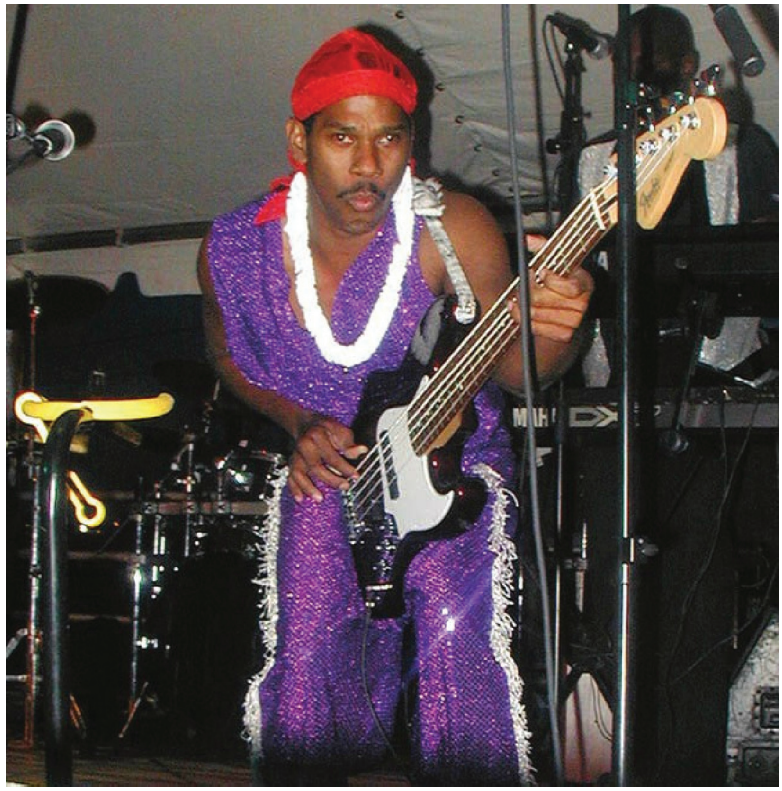
Ex. 3a



Ex. 3b



Slave



Mark Adams

"Stone Jam"

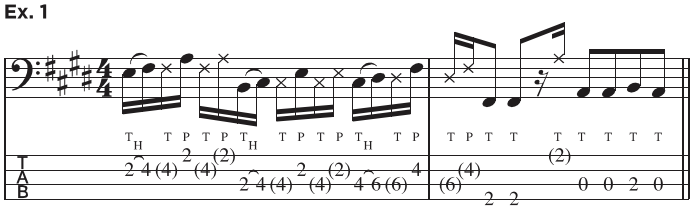
BACK IN THE DAY, FEW REGIONS COULD top the state of Ohio's groove-a-licious contributions to the Billboard charts and DJ stacks. Canton had the O'Jays; Cleveland, the Dazz Band; Cincinnati claimed Bobby Womack, the Isley Brothers, and Bootsy; and Dayton was home to Roger Troutman and Zapp, Lakeside, the Ohio Players, and a stanky little ensemble called Slave.

Perhaps the most underrated of Dayton's funk bands, Slave was in many ways a typical late-'70s dance group, featuring a rhythm section, a keyboard player, a horn section, a guitarist, soulful harmonies, as well as male and female vocalists who alternated between leading and singing together. What set Slave apart from most other dance bands, however, were the upfront bass lines of Mark "The Hanselor" Adams. Over the course of five Slave albums released between 1977 and 1980, Adams perfected a distinct approach to tone, groove, and embellishment that has influenced legions of bass players.

If you could get just one Slave album, make it 1980's *Stone Jam* (though Rhino's excellent 1994 compilation *Stellar Fungk: the Best of Slave* is pretty cool, too). Even on an album packed with basstastic goodies like "Never Get Away" and "Sizzling Hot," the title track to *Stone Jam* topped them all. To replicate the monster *F#m* groove, loosen up your slapping hand and dig in to **Ex. 1**. Once you learn the basic line, try replicating Adams' slides and timing throughout the song, and fast-forward past the epic guitar solo to hear Adams go for broke in the last minute of the 6:40 track.

Listening to Slave today reminds us of a time when bass players didn't have to also be producers, bandleaders, composers, or businessmen to make a living--just being a slammin' 4-string demon with energy, feel, and fresh ideas seemed plenty. Mark Adams was at the right place in the right time, and his groove will never be forgotten. **SM**

Ex. 1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Pleasure

Nate Phillips

"Glide"

AT A TIME WHEN FUNK HAD A FIRM foothold around the Great Lakes, where bands like Parliament, the Ohio Players, Slave, and Earth, Wind & Fire cranked out industrial-strength soul, Portland, Oregon's Pleasure was happy to blaze its own jazzy dance trail in the Northwest. "We were sort of isolated up there," says bassist Nate Phillips, "so we just did our own thing." The group's fusion-influenced dance music reached its peak with "Glide," the Top Ten R&B single from the album Future Now [Fantasy, 1979]. The tune sports some of the finest bass work of the era, as Nate drives the track with his formidable slap-and-pop technique. It's the kind of dense, booty-shaking line every would-be funkateer wishes they had written.

Phillips grew up working the berry and bean fields outside Portland, where AM pop radio was his escape from the bugs, dirt, cold, and hunger. "My brother and I would play R&B records," he says, "and we'd turn them up so loud they would engulf me, man!" By the time Nate was old enough to sneak into clubs, he had started playing around town. "We were doing songs by Kool & the Gang, the Ohio Players, and Dyke & the Blazers, but we were also influenced by jazz and early fusion, like Herbie Hancock's Fat Albert Rotunda, Miles Davis's Bitches Brew, and stuff on producer Creed Taylor's CTI label."

Nate spawned the lick that became "Glide" on a visit to his mother's house in Portland. "I had my Fender Jazz Bass with me—I always took it wherever I went. I was messing around playing 10ths, because I had noticed guys like Chuck Rainey doing that a lot. After about 20 minutes of working it out, I taped it and left it alone until our next rehearsal. When I played the line, everybody just fell in perfectly—I didn't have to say anything. I have to give it up to them and their energy and enthusiasm. I'm deeply flattered and humbled by the comments young bass players make about the song—it blows me away. But I didn't do it alone."

Nate Phillips (upper right) with Pleasure.

Glide On By

Naturally, you'll want to loosen up before sliding on into "Glide." It's a challenging line that'll give your thumb one helluva workout, and it'll have your fretting hand jumping up and down the neck. Nate kicks off the intro groove with a string of slap-and-pop disco octaves, positioning his hand so his thumb is roughly parallel to the strings and popping with his index finger. Things start to heat up after the ghost-note pickup to bar 3, where Nate follows up his hip-dipping hammer-on with a slide into *G* and a sturdy syncopated figure. On various repeats of this intro line, Nate fills out his line with muted ghost-notes. "I throw those little ghost-notes in there to keep the line moving," he says. Nate rests for most of bar 4, leaving room for Marlon "the Magician" McClain's snaky guitar licks until his authoritative pop on *D*. (Note: There are a few different edits of "Glide," including the full 6:31 album track and a 4:24 radio edit. The second ending at bar 12 can only be heard on the full version.)

Continued

On the held F in the intro's third ending, take a deep breath—here comes the good part! What follows is a tight little four-bar phrase that has just about every trick in a funk bassist's tool kit—double-stops, slides, hammer-ons, double-thumbing, triplets—you name it! Nate gets a jump on the verse groove by anticipating the one on the pickup to bar 23, where he first plucks the double-stopped 10ths with his thumb and index finger. The upbeat chromatic slide into the *C♯m* double-stop in bar 24 sets up that bar's downbeats so they have maximum impact. In bar 25,

Nate's bass line becomes hyperkinetic, as he uses a double-stop slide to connect two impossibly funky licks. Be sure to drill this passage at moderate tempos before taking it on at full speed—the beginning of this line is pretty sparse, but it really picks up. Note that in bars 26 and 30, Nate pops—rather than slaps—the downbeats of two, three, and four.

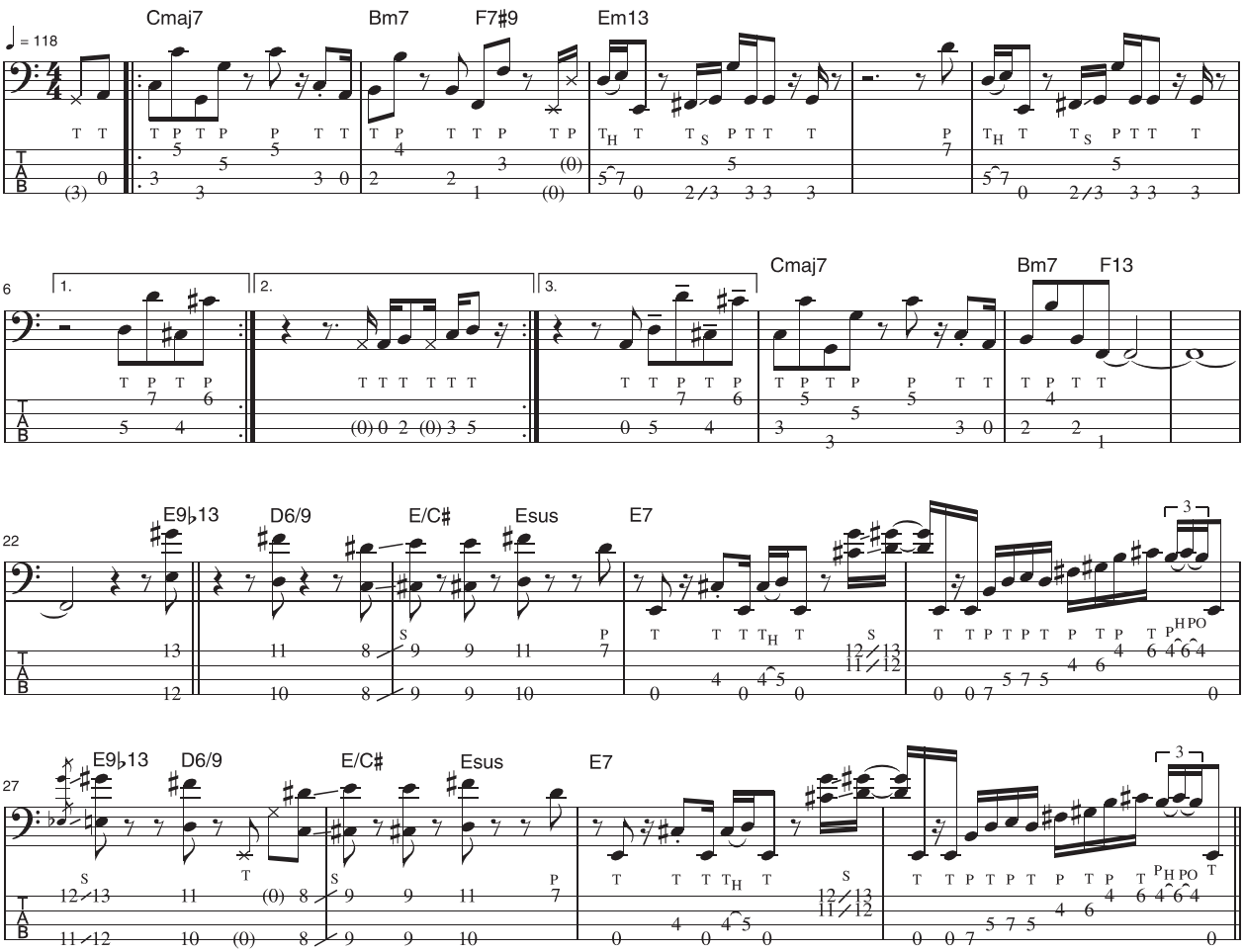
Future Now

Though Pleasure disbanded back in 1981, Nate has continued to play actively, producing and playing in the Dazz Band through the '90s. In 2000 and 2001 he played alongside members of the SOS Band, Con Funk Shun, the Gap Band, and the Bar-Kays as part of the United We Funk All-Stars project. Most recently, Phillips has kept busy slinging his Bossa 5-string with smooth jazz saxophonist Richard Elliot and trumpeter Rick Braun, and he's currently writing and arranging material for a solo record. Nate continues to find inspiration in exciting jazz and fusion players who can "go crazy," but he feels deeply connected to his R&B roots. "When I hear Motown records I just have to smile, because that's the stuff. That's me. Forget soloing—there ain't no messing around holding it down!" **SM**

Tone Zone

"Everybody asks how I got that tone," says Nate. "I used my '70 Fender Jazz, which has a maple fingerboard with block inlays. I remember putting a fresh set of Rotosound roundwounds on right before doing that take. Our engineer Phil Kaffel said, 'Your bass sounds so good, let's just go straight into the 24-track.' When we mixed it, I think he used Keypex or a Urei compressor. They had to fight to get the bass that high in the mix. I thought it was too much; I love hearing other bass players real loud, but not myself."

Ex. 1



"Glide" by Nathaniel Phillips. © 1979 Lecarna Music (ASCAP). All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Patrice Rushen, Herbie Hancock, Patti LaBelle

"Ready" Freddie Washington

"Forget Me Nots"

AT THE DAWN OF THE '80S, THE FIRST wave of Larry Graham-inspired would-be thumbslingers receded, leaving a number of true slap standards glistening on bassdom's beachfront. Patrice Rushen's "Forget Me Nots" is one such classic.

The song was conceived and played by veteran first-call L.A. session bassist "Ready" Freddie Washington. Washington, who grew up in Graham's native Oakland, California, started on upright bass in the eighth grade and switched to electric bass soon after. His mentor was another great Bay Area bassist, Paul Jackson, whom Freddie eventually replaced in Herbie Hancock's Headhunters in 1977. Rushen heard Freddie while performing with the band in San Francisco and brought him to Los Angeles in 1978, where he embarked on a hugely successful session career. His resumé eventually included work with Michael Jackson, Kenny Loggins, Al Jarreau, and George Duke; such hit tracks as Dionne Warwick's "That's What Friends Are For" and Anita Baker's "Sweet Love"; and the bass chair for TV's legendary Motown 25th Anniversary Special. "I always knew what I wanted to do: play on records," Washington says. "I scrutinized thousands of album tracks growing up, always thinking, How could I fit in and bring something to this song?"

Freddie brought both his playing and composing skills to Rushen's first six solo outings, which are represented beautifully on Rhino's *Haven't You Heard: The Best of Patrice Rushen*. "Forget Me Nots" fueled her 1982 breakout album, *Straight from the Heart*, which reached No. 23 on the pop charts and No. 4 on the R&B list. The song exploded again in 1997 when Will Smith sampled the chorus for his Grammy-winning soundtrack rap, "Men in Black." Washington recalls the writing process: "I was sitting on my bed at home, jamming on my bass, when this line came

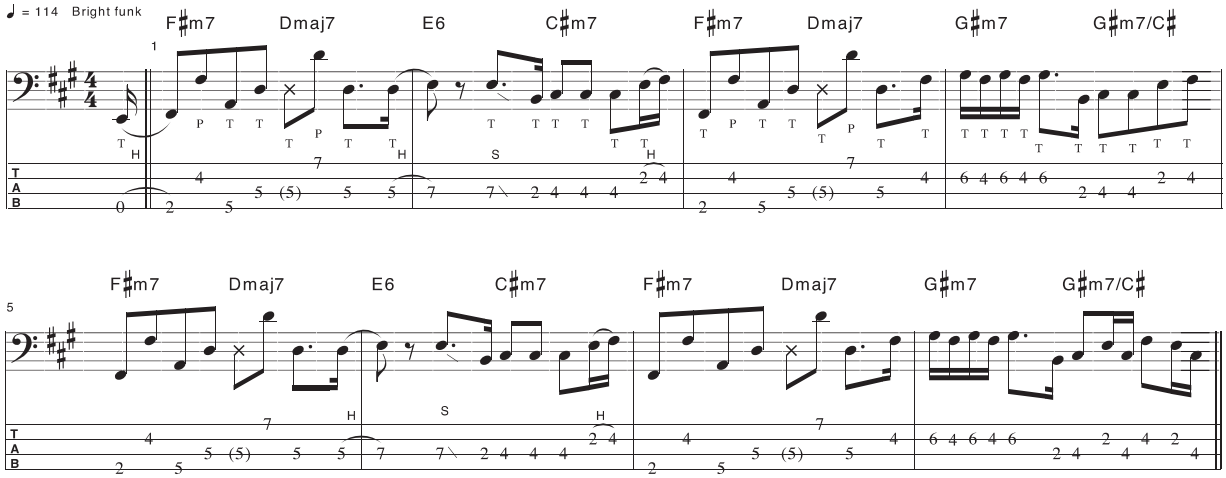
to me. I just went where my fingers took me, and it wrote itself into an entire song. I made a demo at a friend's house, playing to a little rhythm box he had. I took it to lyricist Terry McFadden, who came up with the poetic flower concept. From there I brought it to Patrice, and she and I hashed out the verse melody, chords, and arrangement."

On the session Freddie played his rosewood-board '72 Fender Precision Bass with new roundwound strings. He plugged direct into an API console and added some dbx 160 compression. He laid down his bass line first, along with his friend's beatbox pattern "because it had become an integral part of the song." Next to record was Gap Band/LTD drummer Melvin Webb, chosen by Washington for "a certain lope and swing he added to dance grooves." Rushen followed with her keyboards and vocals, Roy Galloway added background vocals, and Gerald Albright contributed an alto sax solo.

The track revolves around the eight-bar bass hook Washingon lays down at the top of the tune, shown in **Ex. 1**; the line also functions as the bass line for the chorus. **Example 2** illustrates Freddie's verse part. "I purposely kept the drum part simple," Freddie says of the drum pattern [**Ex. 3**], "because the bass drives the track and adds all the little subdivis ions and 'feel' elements. When it came to the fills, my focus was rhythmic more than melodic. I thought of myself as the drummer, building up to Melvin's cymbal crashes on beat *one*."

"That bass line is the whole song," Freddie continues. "If I had switched to a different line in one of the choruses or on the ride-out, I wouldn't have been playing 'Forget Me Nots' anymore!" **SM**

Ex. 1



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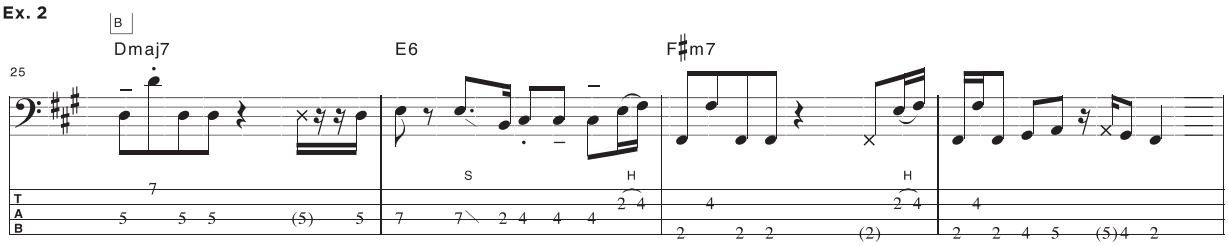

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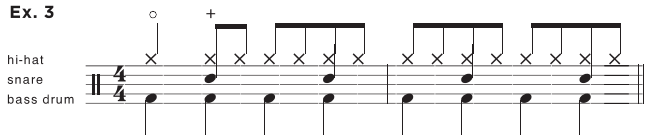

Song by Patrice Rushen, Freddie Washington & Terry McFadden. Transcription by Chris Jisi & Freddie Washington.

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Level 42

Mark King

Bass À La King

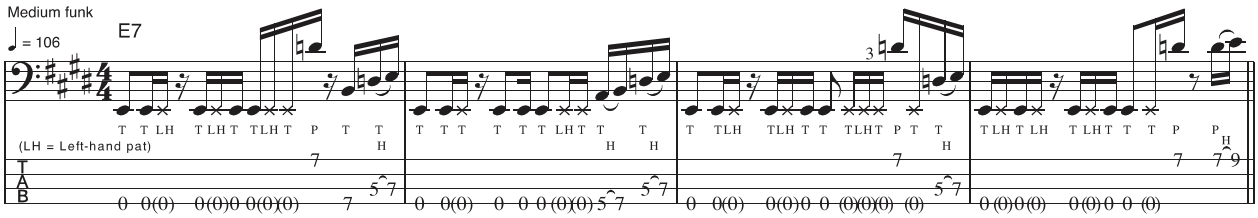
LEVEL 42'S MARK KING STANDS SHOULDER to shoulder with the all-time greats on the slap summit. Need proof? Check out **Ex. 1**, a line in the style of Mark's slapped opening on "Love Games" (from Level 42's self-titled 1981 debut disc). Note the left-hand pats throughout, a key in King's machine-gun style, especially on triplets, as in bar 3. Play the part slowly at first, upping the tempo as you fit the left-hand pats squarely into the pulse.

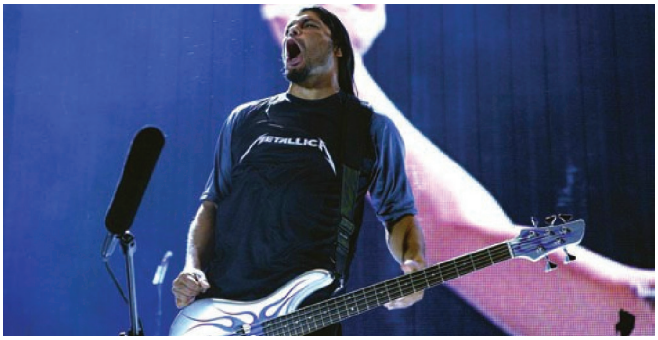
As for King's influences? "Stanley Clarke, for sure," says Mark. "Also Larry Graham, Jaco, Alphonso Johnson, Louis Johnson, Bootsy Collins, Marcus Miller, who I first heard as a teenage bassist on Lenny White's records. A real key guy for me, who is unsung, was the late Doug Rauch. His playing on Santana's *Caravanserai* [Columbia, 1972] and later albums with Lenny and Billy Cobham is *it*—just brilliant! I think the link between them all is how they make their lines swing and really lift the piece. Whether they play frets, fretless, fingerstyle, pick, or slap, it's the groove, baby!"

"The way I slap is very different from someone like Marcus Miller or the serious funk guys," Mark explains. "Their playing has this great gravity that lays the whole thing down. I flutter around like a butterfly. It's more like drumming—especially jazz drumming. When I slap I'm very happy to have a synth bass supplying the fundamentals so I can do what I'm good at doing."

"It's no secret that I started on drums and always wanted to be a drummer," Mark continues. "I still do! But fate seemed to determine I should work in the only music store in London that didn't sell drums. I needed the job, though, so I would sit in the back and pick up a bass when things were quiet. I'd heard Stanley and Doug slapping on records and I tried to figure out what they were doing. In the absence of a teacher pointing out my errors, I just approached it like a drummer and used both hands to build up all kinds of 16th-note-based patterns. That's still the way I hear everything, I haven't pared down my playing much at all. I'm guilty of remaining in my own comfort zone—you can't teach an old dog new tricks!" **SM**

Ex. 1





GLORIA LEVARIO

Infectious Grooves, Suicidal Tendencies, Metallica

Robert Trujillo

"Therapy"

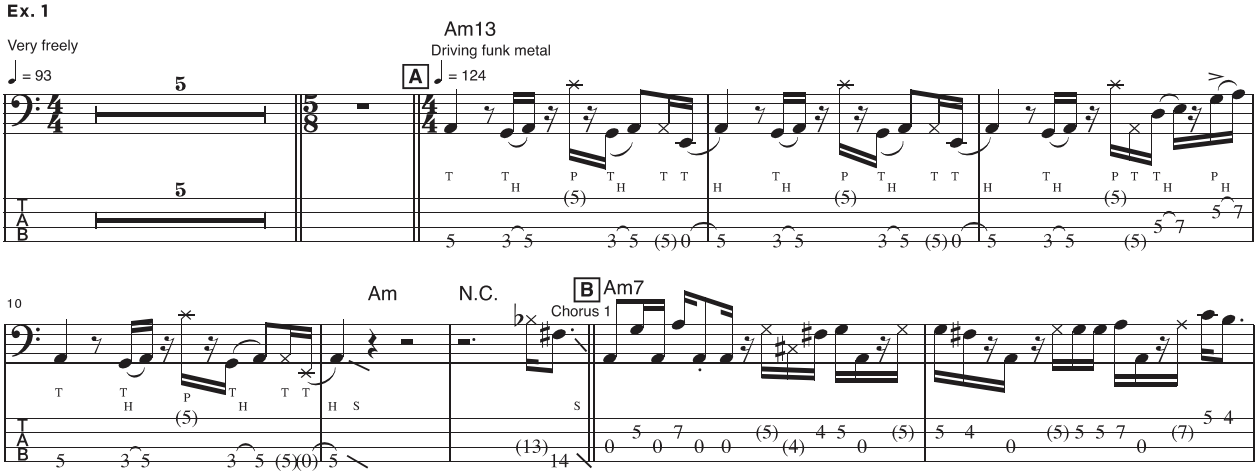
DROP ROBERT TRUJILLO'S NAME INTO any conversation about rock, thrash, or metal, and you'll evoke the now-iconic image of the man: axe slung at knee level, long black locks flailing wildly, his face contorted with equal parts fierce concentration and primal joy. With his razor-sharp technique and more stage presence than De Niro, Metallica's low-end ambassador is one of the highest-profile bassists in music today.

By the time he was invited to join Metallica in 2003, Trujillo (*troo-HEE-yo*) was already a seasoned veteran, having paid his musical dues with such acts as Suicidal Tendencies, Infectious Grooves, and Ozzy Osbourne & Black Label Society, as well as work with Jerry Cantrell of Alice In Chains. After laying the foundations of his style during his teens, the California native first came to attention in the early '90s when he joined crossover-thrash pioneers Suicidal Tendencies. Though the group was already well established, Trujillo's funk and groove sensibilities added an extra dimension to the band's sound that proved pivotal in their subsequent development and success.

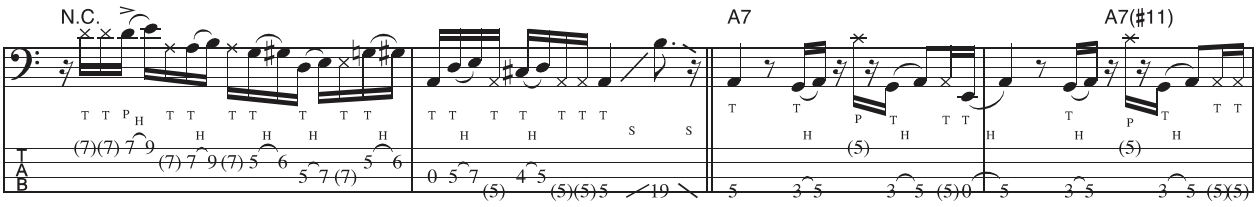
Initially, Infectious Grooves spun off from Suicidal Tendencies as a way of allowing Trujillo and vocalist Mike Muir to plow a funkier furrow without messing with the parent band's formula. The project spawned four studio albums from 1991 to 2000. As the name suggests, the band was all about getting deep inside the pocket and making your toes twitch by fusing the aggression and technique of metal with the subtleties and vibe of old-school funk. Crucially, this format provided the perfect showcase for Trujillo's bass-centered compositions and serious funk chops, exemplified by "Therapy," from the 1991 debut album *the Plague That Makes Your Booty Move … It's the Infectious Grooves* [Epic].

Example 1 shows the tremendous thumb thumps Trujillo plays to establish the tune's groove; **Ex. 2** illustrates the two-bar throwdown he issues towards the end of the song. While Trujillo's current role in one of the world's biggest bands has already guaranteed him a permanent place in metal's pantheon, it's a pity that more people aren't aware that he's also a bona fide, time-served, funk-bass monster. Perhaps it's time to spread the word. **SM**

Ex. 1



Ex. 2



"Therapy" Words and Music by Robert Trujillo & Mike Muir. All rights reserved.

The Commodores

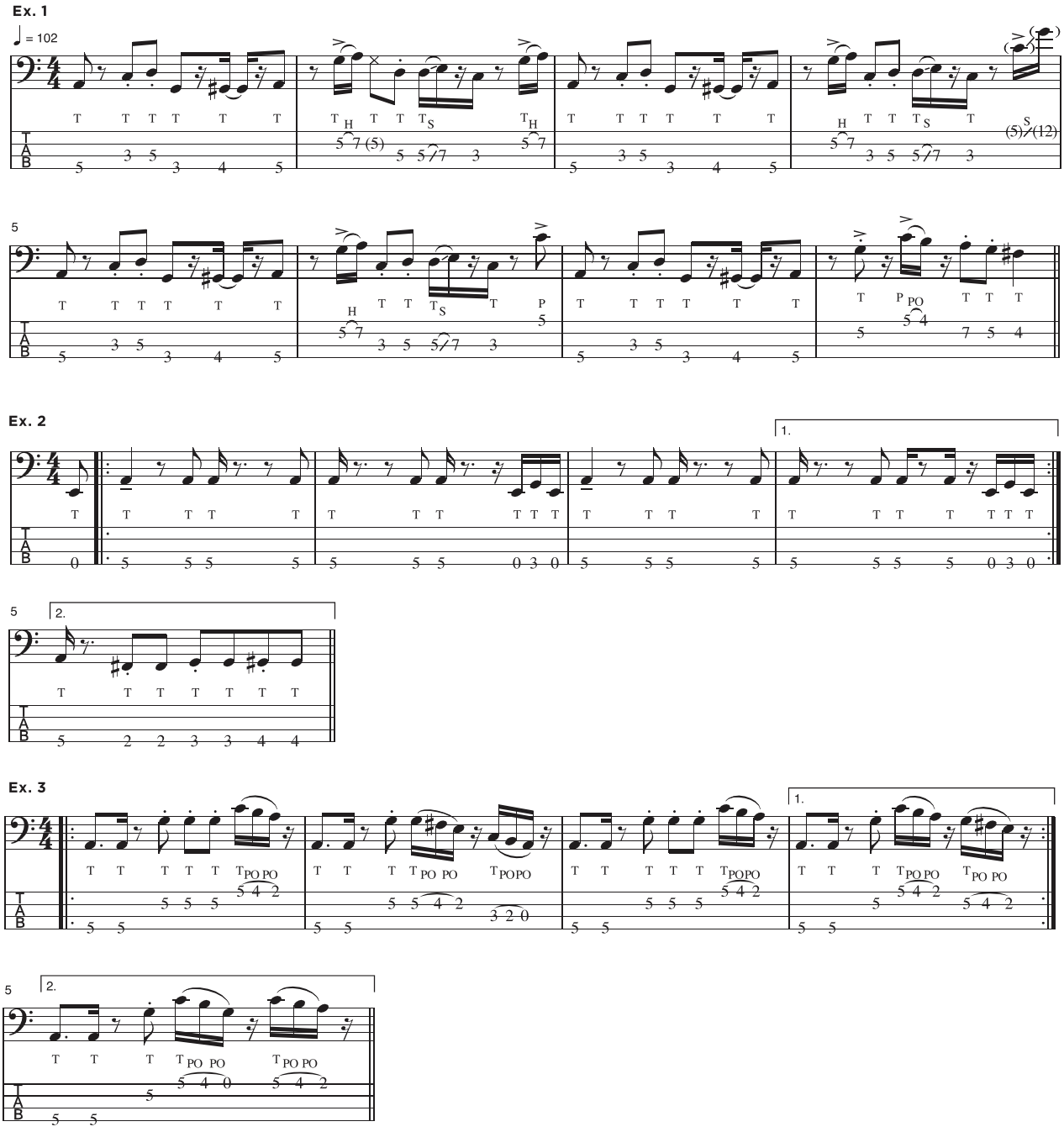
Bringing down the house! The Commodores perform in New York City in 1981.

GARY GERSHOFF/RETNA LTD.

Ronald LaPraed

"Brick House"

WHEN CELEBRATING THE PLEASING nature of a particularly curvaceous physique through song—especially when the lyrical focus is the alteration of a profane 20th-century slang metaphor about a sturdily constructed privy—it only makes sense to have a bass line that is, like the subject, built like an Amazon. That's precisely what Commodores bassist Ronald LaPread achieved with his vigorous part on 1977's "Brick House." **Ex. 1** shows the song's chorus passage, as it appears in the introductory vamp. LaPread constructs a robust two-bar ostinato that is, at the beginning of the first bar, like many archetypal funk bass parts, "on the one." Then, the syncopated motif in the bar's latter half leads into the second part of the phrase, which, true to form, ain't holdin' nothin' back. Together, this juxtaposition of a stacked-and-that's-a-fact first bar and the mighty, mighty second bar produces a swinging feel, perhaps evocative of the entrancing harmonic motion of a pronounced hip-swinging gait. Beat four of these even bars is left open to variation; in bar 4 it's a suggestive slide up the *G* string. LaPread's careful attention to note length—Ex. 1's staccatos—is carried over to the tenutos and clipped 16th-notes in the verse part, demonstrated in **Ex. 2**. There, the rhythmic tension finds partial release with the fills at the end of bars 2 and 4. **Ex. 3** shows LaPread's line on the bridge, where his staccato octaves and 16th-note pull-off figures serve to complement the lyric, as they too shake-it-down-a-shake-it-down-down. **SM**



"Brick House" by Lionel Richie, Ronald LaPread, Walter Orange, Milan Williams, Thomas McClary, and William King. © 1977 (renewed 2005) Jobete Music Co., Inc., Libren Music, Cambrae Music, Walter Orange Music, Old Fashion Publishing, Macawrite Music, and Hanna Music. All rights controlled and administerd by EMI April Music Inc. All rights reserved. International copyright secured.

Bela Fleck & the Flecktones

Victor Wooten

The Open Hammer Pluck

Part One

Many times people come up to me after a show and tell me that when I'm doing a thumb technique, they hear a lot of notes but don't see a lot of motion. That's because I have spent many hours figuring out ways to get the most out of each movement. This is what Bruce Lee and many others have called *economy of motion*. In this issue I'll explain one of my techniques that utilizes this concept: the "open hammer pluck." We'll explore this technique over two lessons, and I hope you'll then be able to explore the endless musical possibilities available with this approach. (You may also want to check out Abraham Laboriel and Brian Bromberg to see how they use open hammer plucking.) I will explain this with the assumption you are a right-handed player; if not, make the necessary adjustments.

"Open hammer plucking" refers to hitting an open string with your right thumb, hammering a note with your left hand, and then plucking a note with your right index finger. It's essentially a triplet. **Ex. 1a** shows the basic pattern; **Ex. 1b** shows an alternate rhythm.

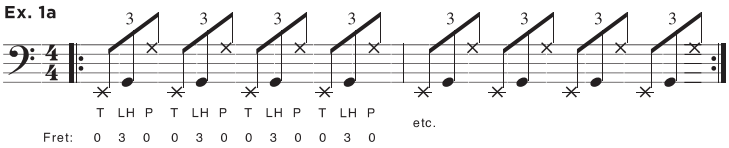
The basic O.H.P. technique is only the beginning—a reference point, to keep our thinking simple, rather than a set rule. The actual pattern may get more complex: as you can see in **Ex. 2**, the hammered note can be changed to play any note you wish. Ex. 2 uses the A major scale, but try this technique with a pentatonic scale or a blues scale, or with any of your favorite patterns. You can even turn a walking bass line into triplets with this technique. It's a little "too much" for many situations, but … oh, well. (If you are trying to lose your gig, this is a great way!)

Examples 3a and **3b** show that the "open" string doesn't necessarily have to be open. And if you want, the hammered note can be two hammers, or you can pluck as may times as you like. So you see, the pattern can change as we move along. Although you may be playing quadruplets or quintuplets with open hammer plucking, it may help you to *think* of them as the basic O.H.P. If you are always thinking of the basic pattern, it will be easier to change the patterns and rhythms you play.

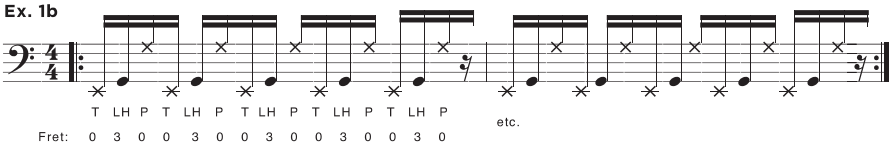
Take these patterns, alter them, rip them up, and turn them inside out. Practice them in all the keys, at different tempos, and using different dynamics. But please remember to keep it musical. The Music Police will be watching, and I don't want them coming after me!

One last thing: All of the notes in these patterns can be changed to protect the

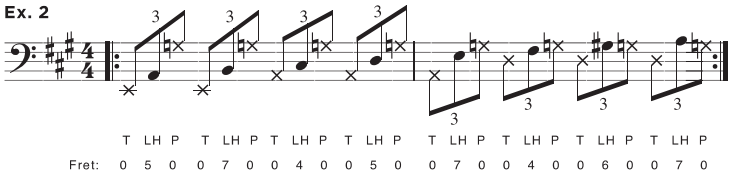
Ex. 1a



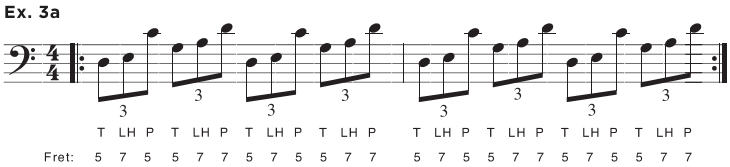
Ex. 1b



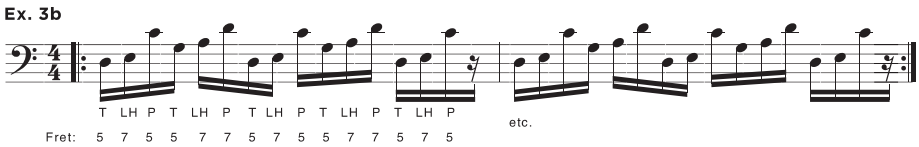
Ex. 2



Ex. 3a



Ex. 3b



innocent. (Wait, I'm sorry–too much TV.) I mean, the notes can be changed to suit your taste or to follow the chord changes of any particular song. Next, we'll explore this concept a little more. Okay? Okay! Peace, Vic.

Part Two

Let's continue from my last column with more open hammer plucking. I hope you've gotten a little more comfortable with the O.H.P. technique. This time, we'll take a look at some more musical ways to use open hammer plucking by applying it to different chords.

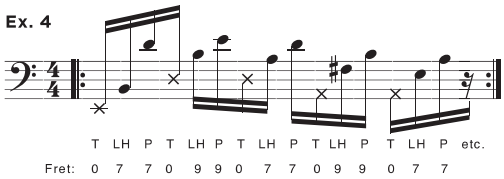
In **Ex. 4**, the O.H.P. is used over a *B* minor chord; in **Ex. 5**, it's used over *C* diminished. **Example 6** shows how to use this technique to outline any chord–try it. Don't worry about the open strings not being in the key in which you're playing; as it's all going by, people probably won't notice them unless you emphasize the pitches of the open strings. Usually it's the hammered notes that define the melody of what you're playing. The open strings just add to the rhythm.

Example 7 is a variation on an example from my last column. It's the same pattern with an additional pluck.

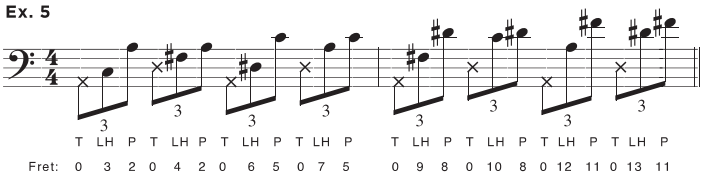
The possibilities are endless with open hammer plucking, so I won't waste your time exploring too many of them. Try out these examples, explore on your own, and have fun!

Peace, Vic. **SM**

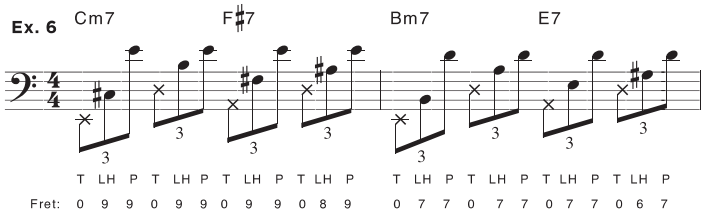
Ex. 4

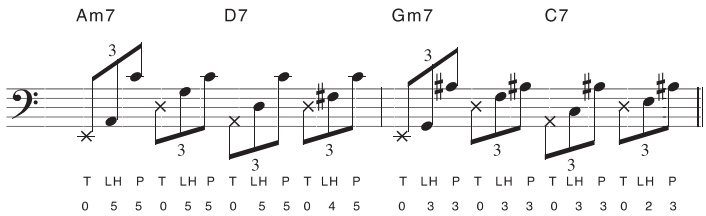


Ex. 5

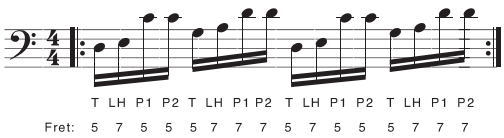


Ex. 6





Ex. 7



Return To Forever, Animal Logic, Vertú

Stanley Clarke

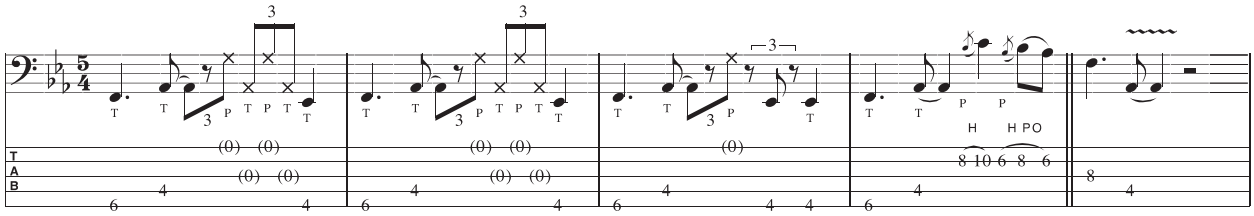
Vertú-al Insanity

Stenley Clarke (left) with Marcus Milelr and Victor Wooten.

KEN CHEONG

IT'S ONLY BEEN A FEW (DOZEN) YEARS since Stanley Clarke funked up our fusion with *School Days* [Epic, 1976], but the doubling, thumbing wonder has continued to put his best funk forward ever since. Example 1 is the opening bass part of "The Call," a nasty 5/4 thumb-style groove from 1999's *Vertú* [Sony, 1999] that sounds and feels surprisingly natural. The ghost-note triplet is a kind of percussive placeholder to help the groove stay in the pocket. The fill in bar 4 ends on the next bar's downbeat, so keep the groove going–just use the higher *F* as your first note. (It's written out here for 5-string bass, although for the recording Stanley played it on a 4-string detuned to *E♭*.)

"'The Call'" is [drummer] Lenny White's tune, and what made it more challenging was he wanted us to make it feel like funk in four," says Stanley. "I used Armand Sabal-Lecco's killer late-'60s Jazz Bass. Lenny is actually the first person I saw slap a bass. I asked him what was that weird Spanish guitar stuff he was doing, and he explained it was inspired by Larry Graham. I took the bass from him and tried it. Later I heard the Graham Central Station song 'Hair,' and that clarified everything." **SM**



"MESA HAS BEEN NOTHING BUT RELIABLE AND CONSISTENT IN TERMS OF TONE AND ROAD WORTHINESS.

MY TONE IS EVERYTHING.
MY TONE IS MESA/BOOGIE."

— BLASKO

WOODSHED

Bottom Line Bass by Alex Sklarevski

SLAP FUNDAMENTALS (PART ONE)

I'D LIKE TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY to go "back to basics" and cover some of the fundamentals of playing slap bass. I'll present this material over the course of several columns, starting at the very beginning, but I'll also try to keep things interesting for those of you who already have some experience with slap. (It might be a good time for a little review, anyway.) Some of the examples are taken from my instructional video, *The Slap Bass Program*; I'm including them not only because they sound cool but because they'll help me to demonstrate certain points.

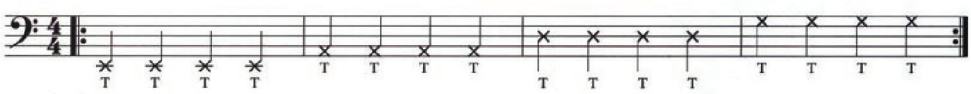
The are two technical building blocks for playing slap bass. Think of them as sort of an action/reaction concept: the *slap*, done with the thumb, and the *pop* (or pluck), done usually with the index finger. For now, don't worry about your left hand—let's just concentrate on right-hand positioning. Place your right arm so your forearm and wrist are parallel to the strings (see **Fig. 1**); this may mean you have to bring your elbow down somewhat closer to the bridge. If you're standing up, your strap needs to be set so this position is possible; if your bass is too low, you won't be able to get your arm parallel to the strings.

While muting the *A*, *D*, and *G* strings, strike the *E* string with your thumb right about where the neck meets the body, or over the last fret. If you make good contact, the thumb will cause the string to hit the frets, producing that bright, metallic "zing" we want to hear. Don't press down on the string with your thumb; let it bounce off. Also, don't just brush the string—you have to actually hit it. (Before I get mail: There are many variations of this technique, and as you get used to it I'm sure you'll find one that works best for you.) As shown in **Ex. 1**, try playing each of the strings a few times to get a feel for this motion. You'll notice it's harder to be accurate on the thinner strings—so play slowly, and watch your hand.

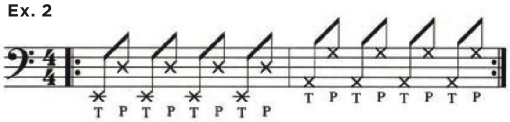
Fig. 1

If the slap is the "action," the pop is the "reaction." Use about the last half-inch of the tip of your index finger to pull the *G* string away from the bass, and then release it. Don't yank the string too hard—just let the natural string tension pull it off your fingertip so it snaps down onto the neck. If you've kept the same hand position you had earlier, you'll see that your index finger is pretty much in line with where the neck and body meet; in this area, the string tension is not too loose or too tight. Pluck the *D* and *G* strings a few times to get a feel for this motion. Once you've done that, practice

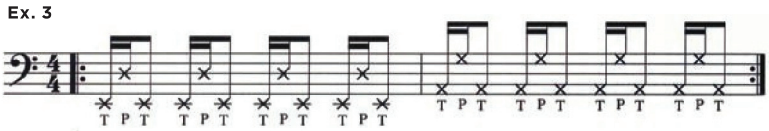
Ex. 1



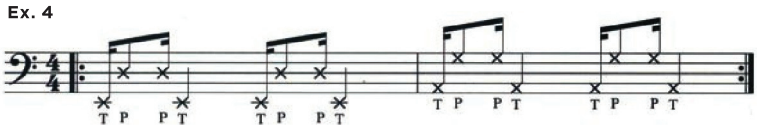
Ex. 2



Ex. 3



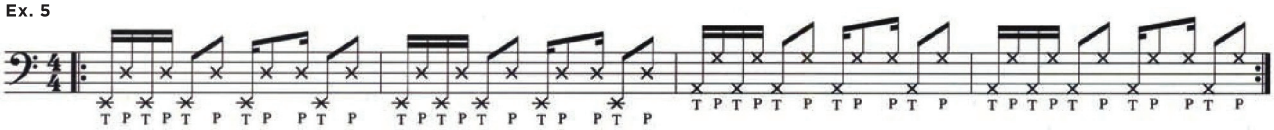
Ex. 4



muting the string immediately after popping it; this produces the staccato sound usually associated with popping.

The fundamental exercise to practice the thumb/pluck motion involves playing octaves; play them using string pairs: *E* and *D*, and *A* and *G* (see **Ex. 2**). These are the string combinations you would normally use to play octave patterns. Listen carefully to the sound, and try to strike a balance between the volume of the thumb slap and the pluck. Neither one should be louder than the other. If your hand starts to hurt, take it easy. Build up slowly to the point where Ex. 2 is comfortable to play, and then try some different rhythms (**Ex. 3** through **Ex. 5**). We'll continue with this technique next time. **SM**

Ex. 5



Bottom Line Bass by Alex Sklarevski

SLAP FUNDAMENTALS
(PART TWO)

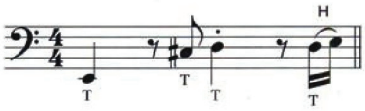
IN OUR LAST INSTALLMENT, WE LOOKED at the thumb/pluck combination and the starting points for developing good slapping technique. This month, I'll present 12 one-bar bass lines in the key of *E* for you to learn. When you can play several of these examples, try combining them to create two- or four-bar bass lines. When you practice, I'd suggest that you loop each example several times until it really feels comfortable. Your goal shouldn't be to play them fast—instead, strive to be as *accurate* as possible.

Ex. 1, a very standard slap line, is a good starting point. Begin with open *E*, and then play the *C*♯ and *D* on the *A* string. Note the staccato mark over the *D*; it means you should play the note short. Play the two 16th-notes on the *and* of beat *four* as a hammer-on. (The hammer-ons are all indicated with a slur marking and the letter "H.") **Ex. 2** is a variation, with four 16th-notes on beat *four*. **Ex. 3** is another variation, but in this case we play muted *D*'s for the first two 16ths of beat *four*. In **Ex. 4**, we use the two-16ths/eighth combination we worked on last time on beat *two*. **Ex. 5** is the same as Ex. 4, except we use muted notes on beats *two* and *four*.

Ex. 6 should be played with the thumb only. Slide up the open *E* string to the *B* at the 7th fret, and play the *D* on the *A* string without shifting. **Ex. 7** through **Ex. 12** are all variations on Ex. 6; in every case, you should slide up to the 7th fret and continue the line in that position, as it's the easiest place to play the phrase smoothly.

Remember: Be sure to articulate every note; don't gloss over any of them. You want to hear muted notes and pitched notes with the same intensity and attack. Slap on! **SM**

Ex. 1



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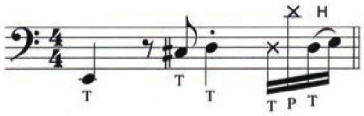
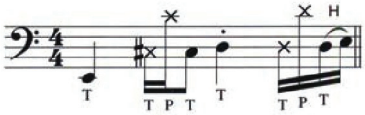


Ex. 3



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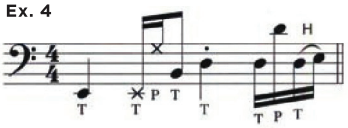

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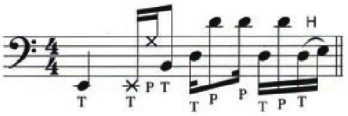

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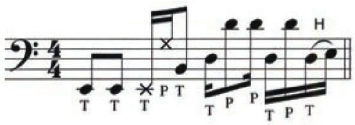
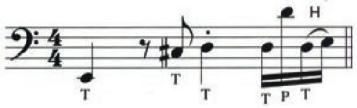


Ex. 7



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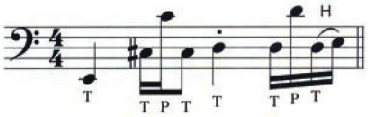

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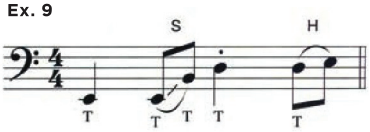
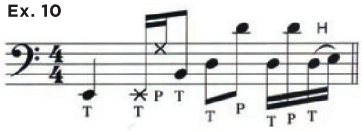


Ex. 10



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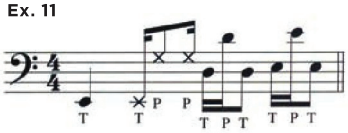

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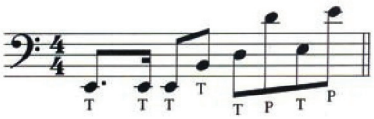


Bottom Line Bass by Alex Sklarevski

SLAP PATTERNS IN THE KEY OF *G*

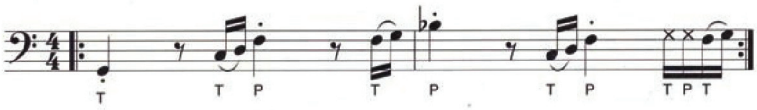
WE'VE SPENT THE LAST FEW COLUMNS looking at bass lines in the key of *E*. The great thing about playing in *E* (on a 4-string, anyway) is that you don't have to worry about unintentionally hitting the string below it with your thumb. Unfortunately—or fortunately, depending on how you look at it—not all tunes are written in *E*, so you'll sometimes find yourself having to slap in keys where the lowest note is not an open string. This month, let's take a look at several bass lines in another common key, *G*.

Ex. 1 is a two-bar phrase that can be played without any position shifts. Start with *G* on the *E* string; the hammer-ons are indicated by slur markings. The first two 16th-notes on beat *four* of bar 2 can be played as a thumb/pluck on the muted *G* string, or you can mute the *D* string, thumb the first ghost note there, and then pluck the second one on the *G* string. **Ex. 2** is a variation on Ex. 1; be sure to place the *F* on the last 16th of beat *one*.

Ex. 3 is a four-bar bass line incorporating the eighth-note octave pattern we looked at in July '96. The articulations are written in; try playing the octaves in bar 4 using legato (long) and staccato (short) notes. Start the last bar on *F* on the *A* string, and play the octaves on the *G* string. Be sure to keep the sound of the thumbed and plucked notes balanced.

In bar 1 of **Ex. 4**, play beat *four* using the muted *D* string for the ghost notes. Play the *B*♭ on the *G* string; this can be a little tricky, so be sure you hear both the ghost notes and the pitches. In bar 4, play the octave patterns with both legato and staccato articulations. Here again we're using the standard two-16th/eighth-note rhythmic pattern. Notice how bar 4 is a close variation of bar 4 in Ex. 3; this kind of rhythmic interpretation can help a bass line to evolve without adding more notes. **SM**

Ex. 1



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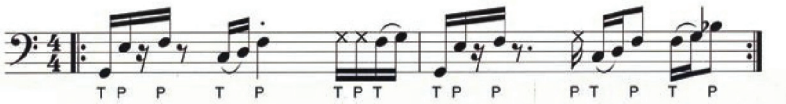

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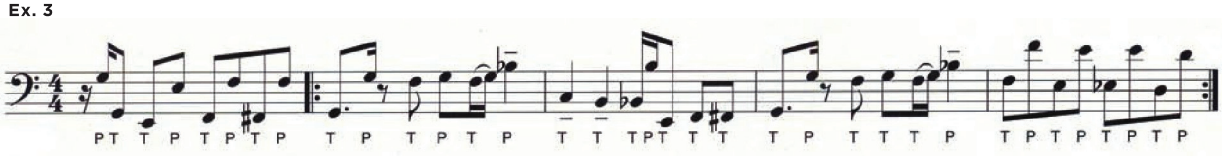
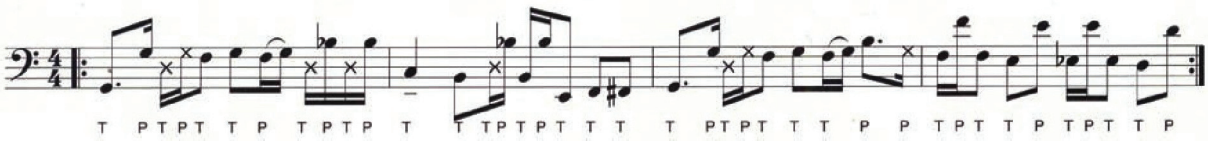


Ex. 4



Slap Basics by Jonathan Herrera

THUMB PLACEMENT

I'M NOT SURE ANOTHER INSTRUMENT can boast of something as controversial as our very own slap-and-pop. Maybe serious flautists kvetch about those who occasionally "pull a Tull," but it seems like slap bass, from shrill and annoying to jaw-droppingly funky, is among the biggest polarizers. To draw a comparison to another contentious craft, slap is the special-effect-driven blockbuster movie of the bass world, while the other bass techniques range from screwball romantic comedy to a nuanced art-house mope-fest. Like a CGI-laden blockbuster, slap bass can be really cool, propelling a piece forward like nothing else, but sometimes it can be an eardrum-piercing bore. As beginners, we are inexorably drawn to it, often inspired by slappy mavericks like Flea and Les Claypool—but we can quickly go astray, losing sight of our primary bass responsibilities. So before learning how to slap, heed my warning ... don't forget the groove!

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Thanks to Larry Graham, slap arrived in the late '60s, and just like every other technique for our young instrument, there isn't a consensus on the ultimate approach. The basic technique usually combines a wrist-twisting thumb slap with an index- or middle-finger pop. But the angle of the thumb to the string, and the use (or disuse) or pops, vary a lot. Some folks prefer to slap with their thumb at a downward angle and their wrist roughly parallel to the neck (**Fig. 1**). They use their forearm's back-and-forth rotation for the bulk of the slap energy, usually resulting in an aggressive tone and, because of the positioning of the index finger, a lot of popped notes. This technique is used to great effect by a lot of bassists—but in my oh-so-humble opinion, it's not ideal. Though beginners seem to gravitate toward this approach without guidance, its limitations don't allow the player to take full advantage of the whole groovy slap world.

I prefer the slap technique of players like Marcus Miller and Larry Graham, which is based on a thumb that's parallel to the string (**Fig. 2**). Though this approach requires the bass to be higher on a strap, its benefits are numerous. It results in a fuller, fatter thumb tone, perhaps because there's more flesh hitting the string. It also seems to make the thumb more dominant, rather than the see-saw slap-then-pop motion of the other approach. This means that brash pops are available, but not an essential product of the physical technique. The parallel-thumb technique is also more controllable, allowing for advanced techniques like Victor Wooten-style double thumbing and cool syncopated ghost-notes and funk patterns.

For now, look at the photos and see where your burgeoning slap technique stacks up. If you find yourself drawn to the first approach, don't sweat it! We'll apply the slap technique to some cool beginner lines in a future installment. **SM**

The Language of Music by Glenn Letsch

SLAPPING: AN INTRODUCTION

EVERY BEGINNING BASSIST WANTS TO learn to slap and pop. It sounds great and looks impressive, and I bet you've said to yourself, "I want to be able to do that!" But just slapping the right string can be frustrating, let alone getting a good sound. Slapping isn't that hard to do, though, so let's dive in.

Before you do anything else, put on a brand new set of roundwound strings. If you try to slap on tired old strings, you won't get a great sound. You will wonder what you are doing wrong, even if you are doing everything right.

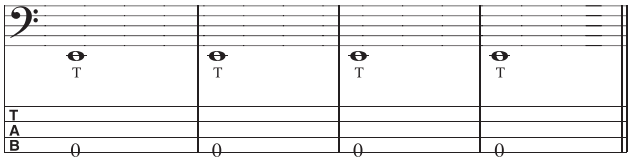
As for hand position, forget everything else you've heard and think "hitchhiking." Put your hand and arm straight out in front of you. Curl your fingers a bit and point your thumb up (to the 12 o'clock position). Keep your hand loose; don't stiffen up. Now rotate your thumb to 9 o'clock. Watch closely: Your elbow should be the only joint that moves.

Hit the *E* string near the end of the neck; think of a thumb karate chop. The force isn't going to break a board in half (and it shouldn't)—but it will give you the classic slap sound that may be evading you. The idea is to provide enough downward force so that the string strikes the frets; this creates that bright, zingy sound. When you hit the string, let your thumb bounce off so the note actually sounds. Keep your fretting hand resting against the three other strings so they stay quiet; whichever string you are slapping, all the others must remain silent, or else it will be an exercise in futility. Most important: Keep your slapping hand loose.

The following exercises are strictly for the thumb—no popping, please! Let's get the thumb right before anything else. Play **Ex. 1** and make sure you're getting a big, round sound. Next, try **Ex. 2**. Keep your quarter-notes steady and even. **Ex. 3** is an eighth-note groove with a little more syncopation. Remember to keep your hand loose. **Ex. 4** consists of steady eighth-notes. Make sure your sound is consistent from note to note.

Your slapping should eventually feel as natural as your fingerstyle technique, but you'll have to practice this a lot just to get your sound right. Then practice being accurate with the metronome. Be patient and work through these exercises slowly—it will all pay off big time. **SM**

Ex. 1



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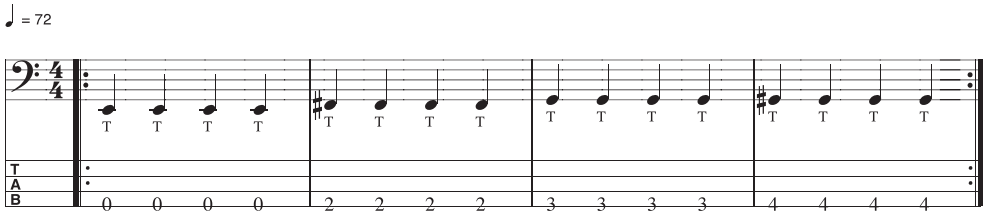

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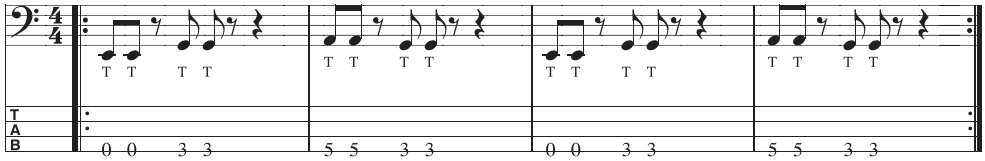

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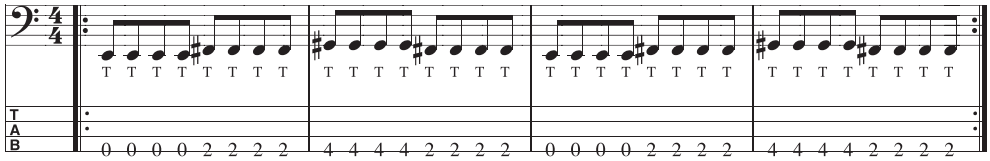


The Language of Music by Glenn Letsch

MUTING

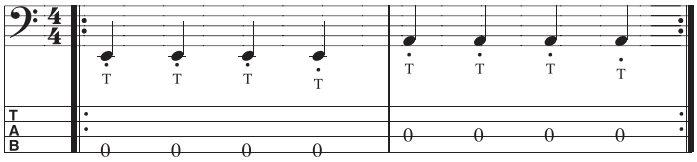
LAST TIME WE BEGAN DISCUSSING basic slap technique and getting a good sound. Achieving the right tone is one thing, but getting control is another. It will take a lot of practice. Work on this technique with your amp off; it will keep you on better terms with anyone you live with. When I was first learning to slap, my wife would ask me to go into the other room. I must have sounded lame trying to funk out before I had thumb technique down. It can take anywhere from six days to six months before you start to sound like a funk machine, so be patient. Yes, you will get frustrated, because it's a new thing for your hand to do. Just persevere—you *will* reach your goal.

Once you have a good, solid tone, the next step is to learn muting to add some feel to your slapping. You *must* learn to control the length of your notes by muting. If you can stop the string from ringing uncontrollably, your slapping will start to feel percussive.

For starters, mute with the fretting hand. Keep your fingers in what I call the "bunch of bananas" position—gently curved so your fingertips are coming straight down on the fretboard—and play staccato (short) quarter-notes (**Ex. 1**): Slap your open *E*, and then bring down your fretting-hand fingers and rest them against the string to stop the ringing. Don't push down on the string, as you might actually fret a new note. It's okay if your fingers touch the other strings; they are probably ringing a little sympathetically anyway. If you slap on the downbeat and mute on the upbeat, each staccato quarter-note will sound like an eighth-note. Be sure to mute the *E* string before you hit the *A* string. **Ex. 2** will help you master this.

When playing fretted notes (Ex. 3), release the string from the fret but *do not* release your fingers from the string; otherwise it will ring uncontrollably. **Ex. 4** mixes up staccato and non-staccato notes. Be sure you're properly muting all of the staccato notes while letting the others ring for their full value. **SM**

Ex. 1



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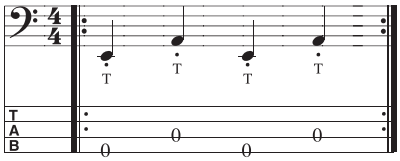

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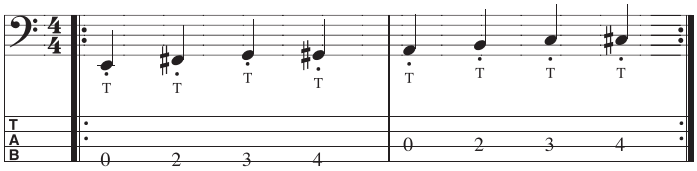

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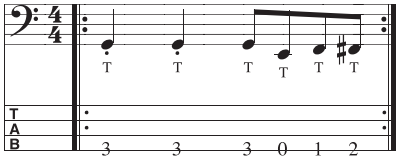


The Language of Music by Glenn Letsch

GHOSTING & MUTING

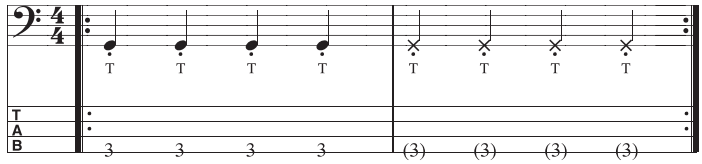
IN MY PREVIOUS TWO WOODSHEDS I have been discussing basic slap technique. To review: Hold your right hand in "hitchhiking" position, with your thumb out and your hand relaxed. Strike down on the string with the side of your thumb like a karate chop. The elbow joint moves—nothing else. Muting with the fretting hand makes your slapping sound more percussive.

Let's move forward and address *ghost notes*. Ghost notes are effective in fingerstyle funk and many other styles—but they're especially effective in slap bass. In fact, they may be even more important in slapping, because the ghost notes allow your slapping hand to continue to motor through the pulse of the groove. Just as a solid pickstyle bassist (or rhythm guitarist) keeps his or her right hand moving like a metronome, so does the slapping bassist. The steady pendulum effect of your thumb stabilizes the groove and keeps you in time. Plus, ghosting lets you play all sorts of percussive notes that seem to come from out of nowhere, making you part drummer, part bassist.

Let's try some examples. Remember the "bunch of bananas" fretting-hand position: If you mute the strings with more than one fretting-hand finger, you will avoid ringing open strings and overtones, which undermine your ghosts. The more fingers you use to mute, the more percussive the ghost notes sound. As for the slapping hand, while you're muting with the other hand, continue slapping as if you were going for a "real" note. Together, both hands create the ghost-note sound.

Practice these examples in sequence; each is slightly more demanding than the previous one. **Examples 5** and **6** are actual useable grooves that you should be able to embellish upon once you have mastered them. Experiment and try some of your own ideas based on this method. But always, *always* strive for that Larry Graham funk-attack snap—punchy notes, with super-quiet unplayed strings. That just might be the toughest part, so make sure you're up to it! **BP**

Ex. 1



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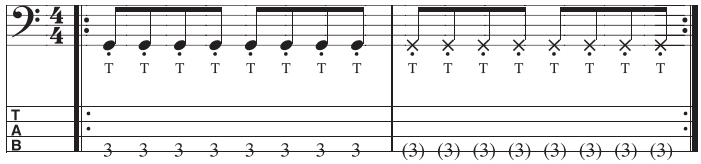

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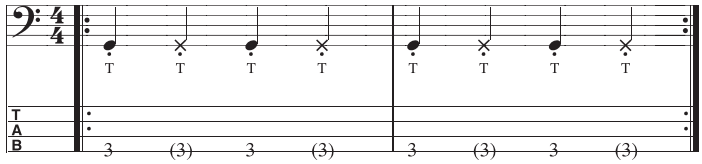

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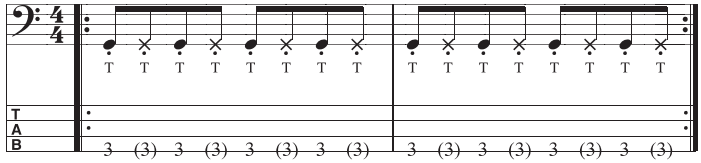

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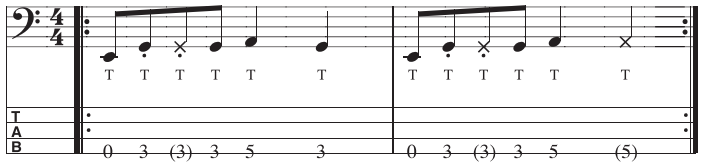

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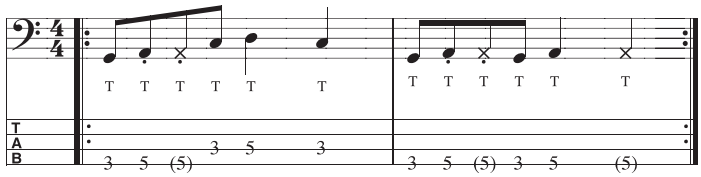


The Language of Music by Glenn Letsch

POPPING

LET'S INCORPORATE FINGER POPPING— snapping a string with one of your fingers– into your repertoire. Popping is slapping's other half. You should consider it the "the second half," because you should master thumb technique first. If you try to master both techniques at once, your learning curve will be steeper.

Making an analogy between drumming and slap-and-pop technique, think of your thumb as a kick drum and your finger as a snare. The kick and snare rarely play simultaneously; rather, the two drums "talk" and react to each other. Typically we pop the *D* and *G* strings and slap the *E* and *A*, though there are occasional exceptions.

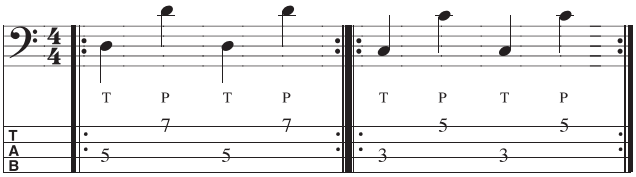
Extend your right hand, palm down, and dangle your middle finger away from your other fingers. This will be the finger you pop with. If you are more comfortable using your index finger, use it; the decision is up to you. (I prefer my middle finger because it is longer.) Using your finger like a pick upstroke, try gently "picking" the open *G* string with the finger's left corner edge. Try not to snag your finger under the string; instead, nick the string with the finger's edge. You will hear when it starts to sound right. If you do this too hard, your pops will be too loud and you could develop a blood blister on your finger. You want to develop a callous instead. If you nick the string rather than snag it, the volume will be more in balance with your thumped note– although understand that popping by nature is louder than thumping.

In terms of movement, slapping and popping can be a very efficient way to play: For every thumped note, you can get a popped note simply by recocking for the next thump. In this way it is similar to picking. This image works for me: Think of your hand holding a gigantic, invisible pick between your thumb and finger.

Let's try some examples. It's always easier to pop the *G* string than the *D*, so let's start there. It is best to practice octaves to get this down (**Ex. 1**). For best sound, don't let the thumped note sustain through the popped octave.

The *D* string requires more finesse to pop (**Ex. 2**); be careful not to hit the *G*. If your popping finger doesn't easily fit between the *D* and *G* strings, consider widening the string spacing just a bit so your fingers can fit more easily. (If you aren't sure how to do this, get someone to help you.) **Ex. 3** speeds things up a little on the *G* string, and **Ex. 4** does the same on the *D*. **BP**

Ex. 1



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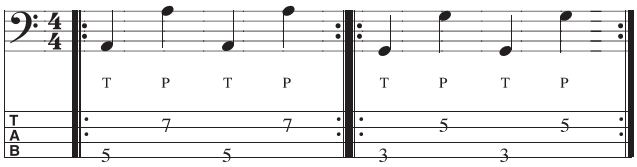
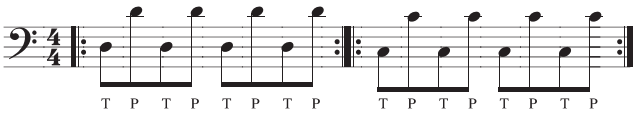
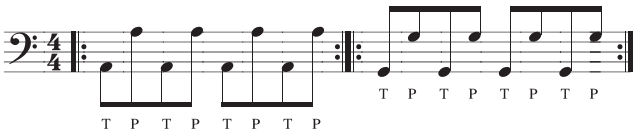


Ex. 3



Ex. 4



The Language of Music by Glenn Letsch

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

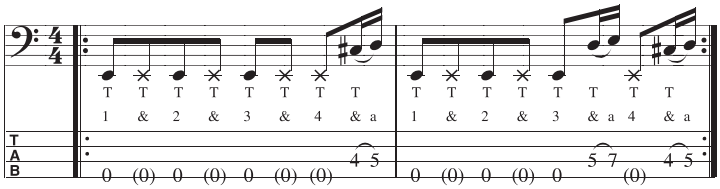
IT'S TIME TO EXPAND YOUR SLAPPING and popping into actual grooves that sound cool. If you've taken the time to work through each of my previous slapping Woodsheds, you are ready for the next step: developing a big, fat slap-and-pop sound.

As you begin to master slap technique, an amazing thing may happen: You start to get past thinking your way through each groove. Magically, the parts start to "play themselves," as you stop thinking about every little detail. The grooves become automatic—and that frees up your mind just to relax and let the groove be greasy. Also, once you are relaxed and confident with your technique, you can get playful. You can change a note here and there as long as it doesn't fight the groove. From there, you can start writing some of your own licks.

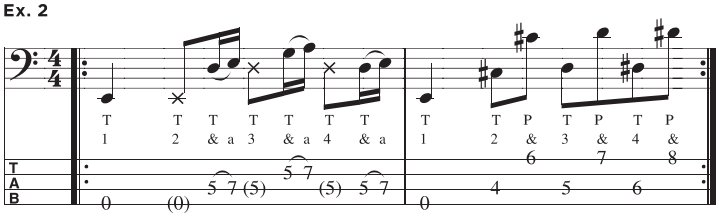
These examples have everything you need to be sure your execution is correct: notation, tablature, slap and pop symbols for each note, and ghost-notes to help keep you locked in the pocket. I've also subdivided each measure. It should be clear exactly where each note occurs in time based on the standard 16th-note subdivisions of beats: *one-e-and-a, two-e-and-a, three-e-and-a, four-e-and-a*. Remember: When playing all ghost-notes you should have two, three, or four fretting-hand fingers resting on the string while striking the ghost note; otherwise, you'll get uncontrolled harmonics, which will weaken your sound. This is critical!

In **Ex. 1**, ghost-notes act as groove maintainers. Don't let your right hand stop moving through each beat. Next, dig **Ex. 2**'s octaves. In **Ex. 3**, keep time by ghosting the upbeat eighth-notes (marked "&"). It will lock you in the pocket. Finally, try **Ex. 4**. Keep your right hand "motoring" through the groove. **BP**

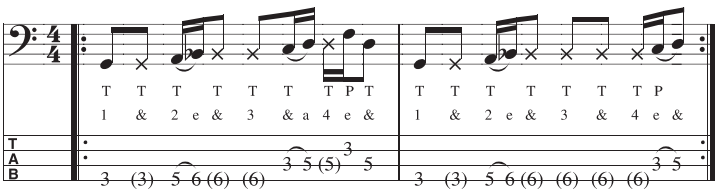
Ex. 1



Ex. 2



Ex. 3



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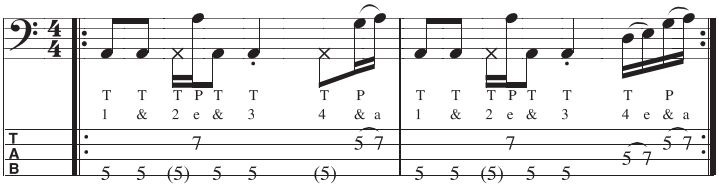

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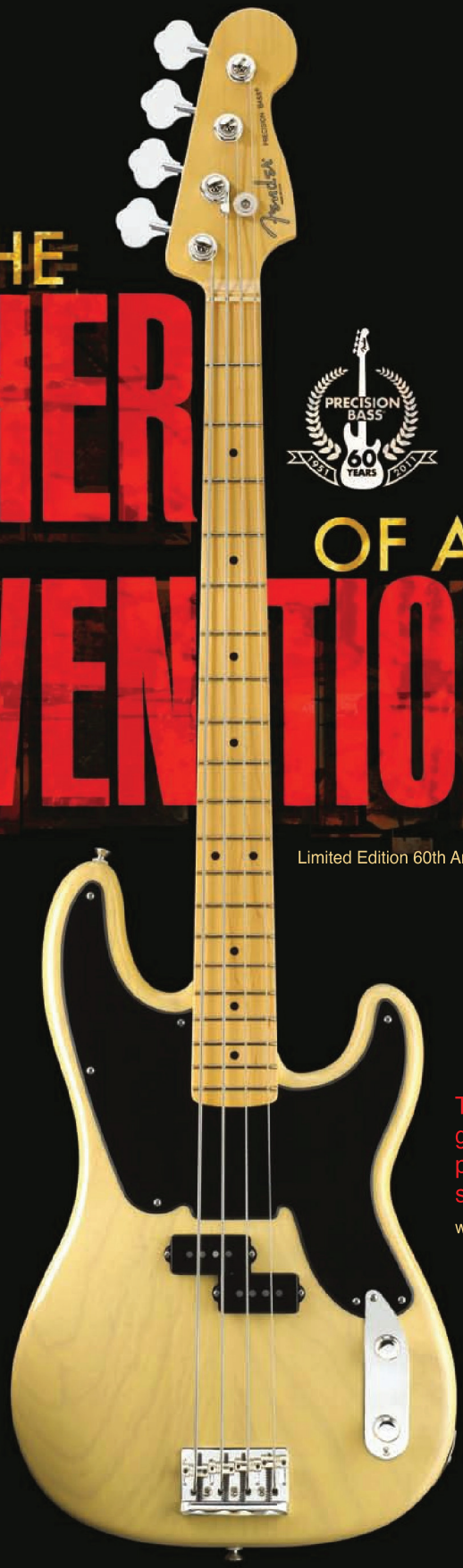

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TRANSCRIPTION

DAVID SANBORN'S "HIDEAWAY"

Neil Jason's Complete Bass Line

BY CHRIS JISI

BROOKLYN-BORN NEIL JASON'S 12-YEAR turn as a first-call New York session bassist coincided with the profession's peak period for "players"—a time when the studio inner circle was equally adept at jingles and jazz-rock fusion sides. Jason was discovered by the Brecker Brothers on his first major date (for Gladys Knight), who promptly enlisted him for their band in 1978. Albums with John McLaughlin and Bob James followed before Jason began permeating the pop charts via platters by Kiss, John Lennon, Paul McCartney, and Billy Joel, and No. 1 hits ranging from "Fame" to "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun." Jason recalls, "Until I got my own place, I lived with both Randy and Michael Brecker, and to see the commitment level of these two icons, practicing six hours a day, was the ultimate musical education for me; I realized I had to work twice as hard just to be in their orbit. Ultimately, what was most rewarding was it gave me a whole new insight and understanding when I went back to playing pop and rock."

Among Jason's woodshed-earned, watershed skills was his slap style—gritty in tone and groove, yet so precise that engineers could forego a compressor to even out his thumps and pops. That sound would reach the radio on Diana Ross's 1981 chart-topping cover of "Why Do Fools Fall in Love." However, one of Jason's fiercest fingerboard forays can be found on saxophonist David Sanborn's 1979 instrumental hit "Hideaway." Sanborn was less than a year away from the first of his memorable collaborations with Marcus Miller (including a more-uptempo revisit of "Hideaway" on the saxist's 1984 disc, *Straight to the Heart*), but *Hideaway* and its catchy title track remain the favorite of many a Sanborn fan.

The session for "Hideaway" took place in early 1979, at Minot Sound, in White Plains, New York. The band—Sanborn, Jason, drummer Steve Gadd, keyboardist Don Grolnick, and percussionist Ralph MacDonald—tracked live, with additional sax, keyboard, and percussion overdubs added later. Neil played his trademark red 1965 L-Series Fender Jazz Bass with new Rotosound strings, and the secret ingredient to

many a Jason track: an Ibanez CS-9 Stereo Chorus pedal. Of his beloved little purple box, which he used in mono, he says, "It was the only chorus that neither degraded nor added to the bass frequencies, while also providing a nice sparkle to the pops on the high end." As was his practice then, his bass was recorded straight to a direct box, then into the chorus pedal, and then into another direct box, so there would be both clean and effect tracks to choose from. (In this case, only the effect track was used.) The other key to Jason's woody, growling tone was his preference for favoring the bridge pickup. "At that time, I liked getting a point on my notes, and the Jaco sound was in everybody's ears, as well."

Jason remembers there being a chord chart with some rhythmic pushes, while Sanborn described the style he wanted and largely relied on his talented team to create and develop parts. Says Neil, "We did a run-through and maybe two takes, and that was it. Neither Steve nor I did any punches or overdubs."

As the track begins at the intro, Jason's chorus pedal can be clearly heard, both on the long tones and the upper-register peek-outs. This continues at Letter **A**, the A-section alto sax melody. With Gadd implying a half-time feel and only chordal padding from the keyboards, Jason's bass motion is immediately established as the other key voice to Sanborn's sax. The melody is restated at **B**, with Jason switching to slapping to up the energy, as Gadd adds pick-ups to his *one* and *three* kick pulse. Neil's octave root-♭7th patterns reveal his main influence on the part, Larry Graham.

The song's chorus, at **C**, launches the full funk, as Gadd introduces backbeat snare cracks and Jason turns up the juice at Sanborn's urging. The key to the section is the two-bar phrase Gadd and Jason (he doesn't recall which of them) settle into, marked by the syncopated figure in the second bar, best seen in bars 41 and 43. Jason generally improvises in the first bar of the phrase, while catching (sometimes with different note choices) or making reference to the syncopation in the second bar. Other signature moves that come to the forefront are frequent slides into and off notes, and his wide vibrato, achieved by bending the fretted string down and up with his left-hand fingers. Among the cooler ideas he spews in this section are bars 40 and 52, in which the lower octaves at the end of the bar are only fretted, not attacked with the right hand.

Letters **D** and **E** return to the intro and A section of the song, respectively. Jason stays in the same vein as previously, adding subtle variations (dig the melodic move in bar 69). The extended out chorus commences at F, with Jason immediately upping the rhythmic quotient. Notable bars include 80–81, 86 (and the similar 90), 96–98 (in which Neil fleshes out an idea), 100, and 102–103. Typical of session cats letting loose during the fade is Jason's finger-plucked upper-register fill in bars 104–105. "In pop, rock, and R&B, I would try to develop a bass line with only subtle variations because I wanted it to be felt as part of the song, not a performance within the song. But in a jazz instrumental situation like this, your performance is part of the song. Still, listening back now, I can't believe how many notes I played! I sure would play less today; to slap and slide and land in the right places—what a chance to take in the middle of a live recording!"

As for play-along advice, Neil, who still subs for Will Lee on the Letterman Show between writing and studio dates, stresses, "Listen to and lock with the drums. Steve Gadd's perfect performance *is* what makes me sound good." He continues, "For me, slapping has two main ingredients. The first is that you're the bassist and the drummer at the same time, so when you practice, make sure some part of what you're slapping and popping is continuously rolling along, keeping time. That's what I got from Larry Graham; when he plays by himself you still hear the drums. The other key is you have to listen to and phrase like the drummer you're playing with. You can't challenge his or her groove, time, and swing; you have to match and fit in-between where they put their upbeats, how far they lay back, and how they feel the spaces. Do that and you'll sound like a pocket genius!" **SM**

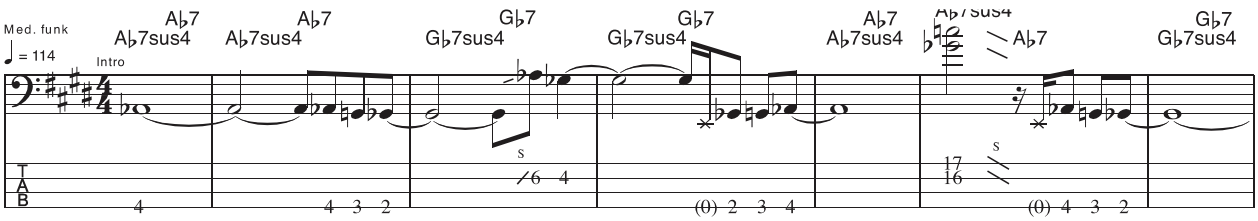
HEAR IT ON
David Sanborn, *Hideaway* [Warner Bros., 1979]

TEN OTHER GREAT NEIL JASON TRACKS

1. Brecker Brothers, "East River" [*Heavy Metal Bebop*, Arista, 1978]
2. John McLaughlin, "Friendship" [*Electric Guitarist*, Columbia, 1979]
3. Bob James, "Friends" [*Lucky Seven*, Columbia, 1979]
4. Diana Ross, "Why Do Fools Fall in Love?" [*Why Do Fools Fall in Love*, BMG, 1981]
5. Roxy Music, "To Turn You On" [*Avalon*, Virgin, 1982]
6. Cyndi Lauper, "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" [*She's So Unusual*, Sony, 1984]
7. Dire Straits, "One World" [*Brothers in Arms*, Warner Bros., 1985]
8. Michael Franks, "Your Secret's Safe With Me" [*Skin Dive*, Warner Bros., 1985]
9. Cyndi Lauper, "True Colors" [*True Colors*, Sony, 1986]
10. Paul McCartney, "Pretty Little Head" [*Press to Play*, Gold Rush, 1986]

DAVID SANBORN "Hideaway"

Transcription by Chris Jisi



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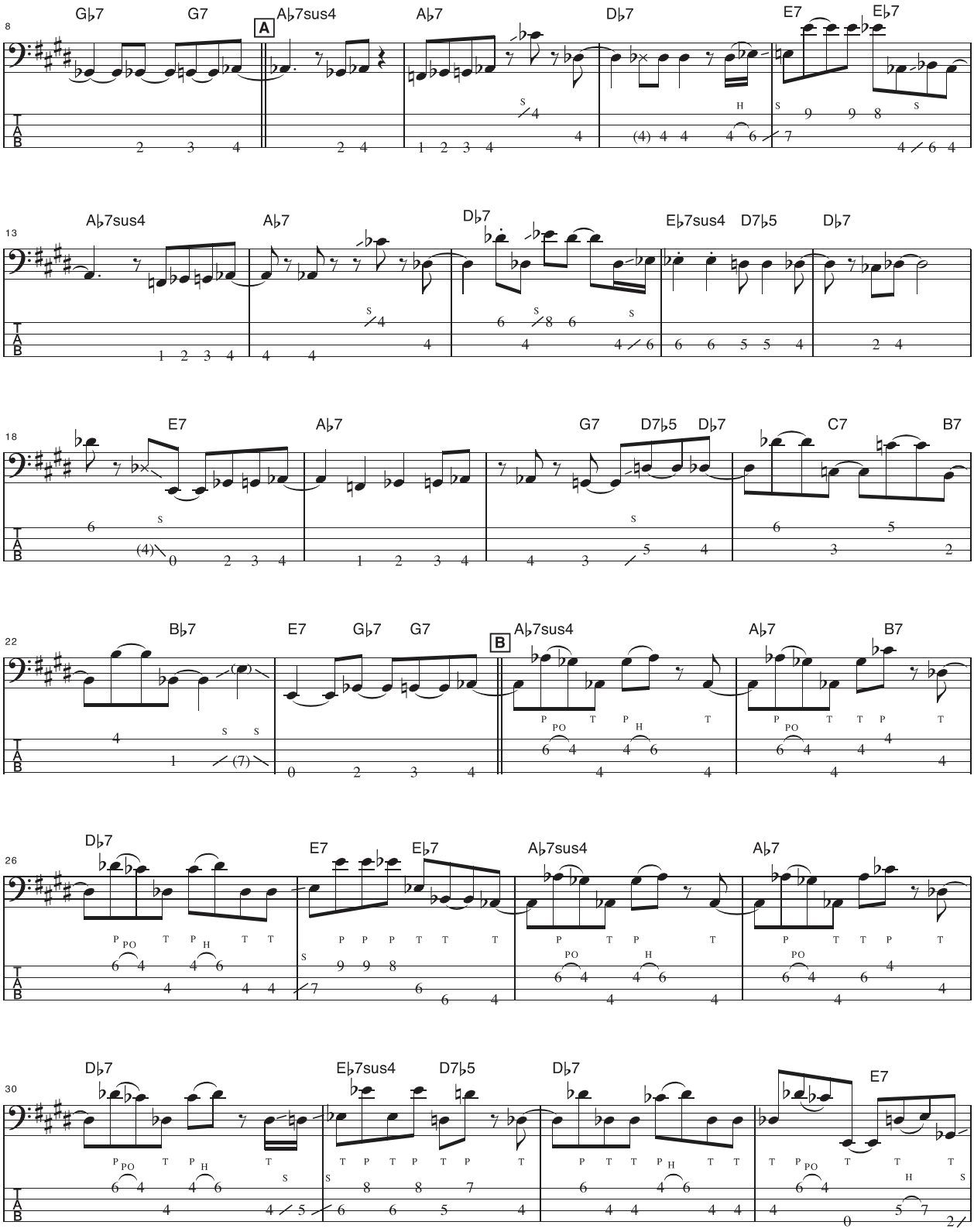

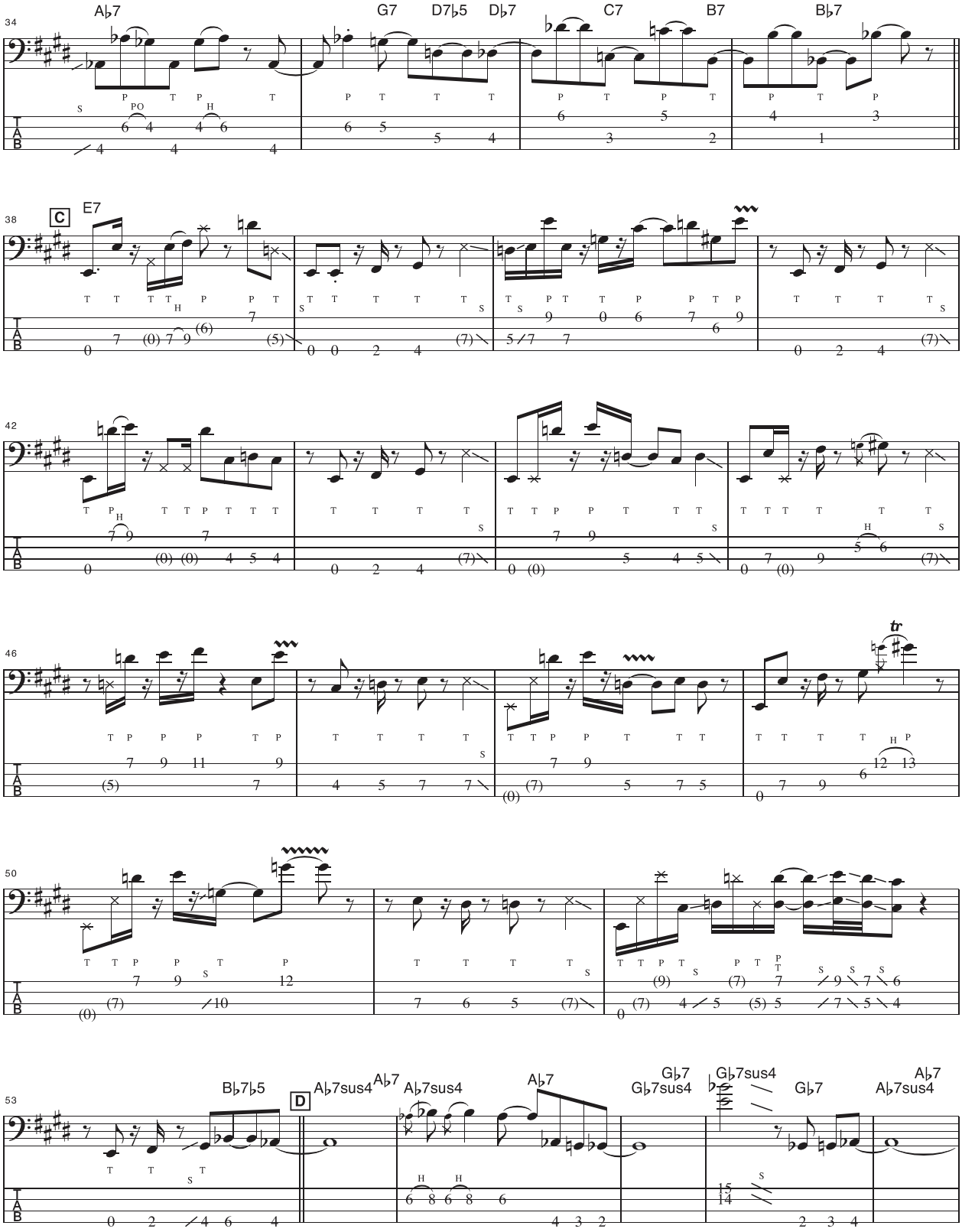
34
A♭7
G7
D7♭5
D♭7
C7
B7
B♭7
38
C
E7
42
46
tr
50
53
B♭7♭5
D
A♭7sus4
A♭7
A♭7sus4
A♭7
G♭7
G♭7sus4
G♭7sus4
G♭7
A♭7
A♭7sus4
TAB

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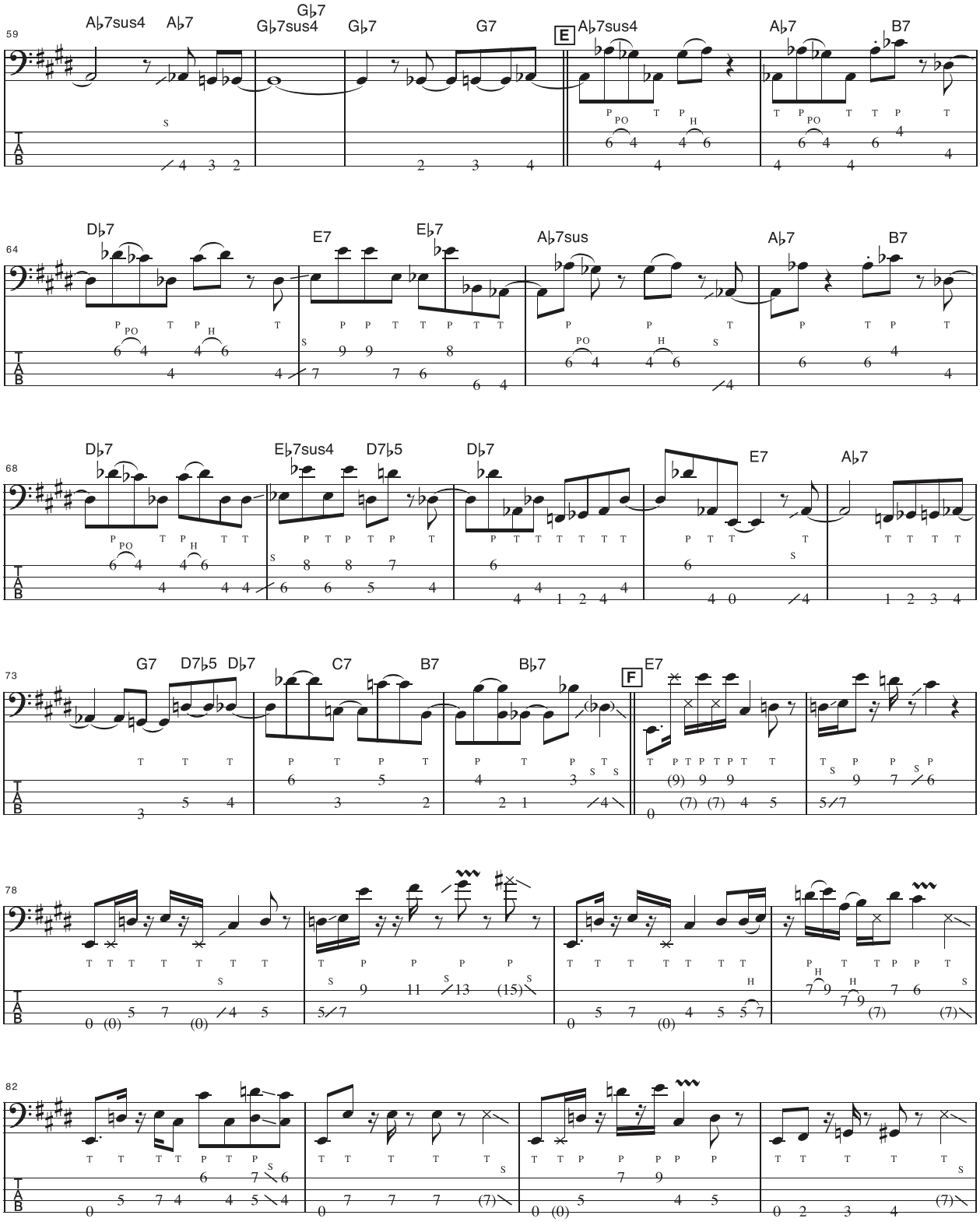
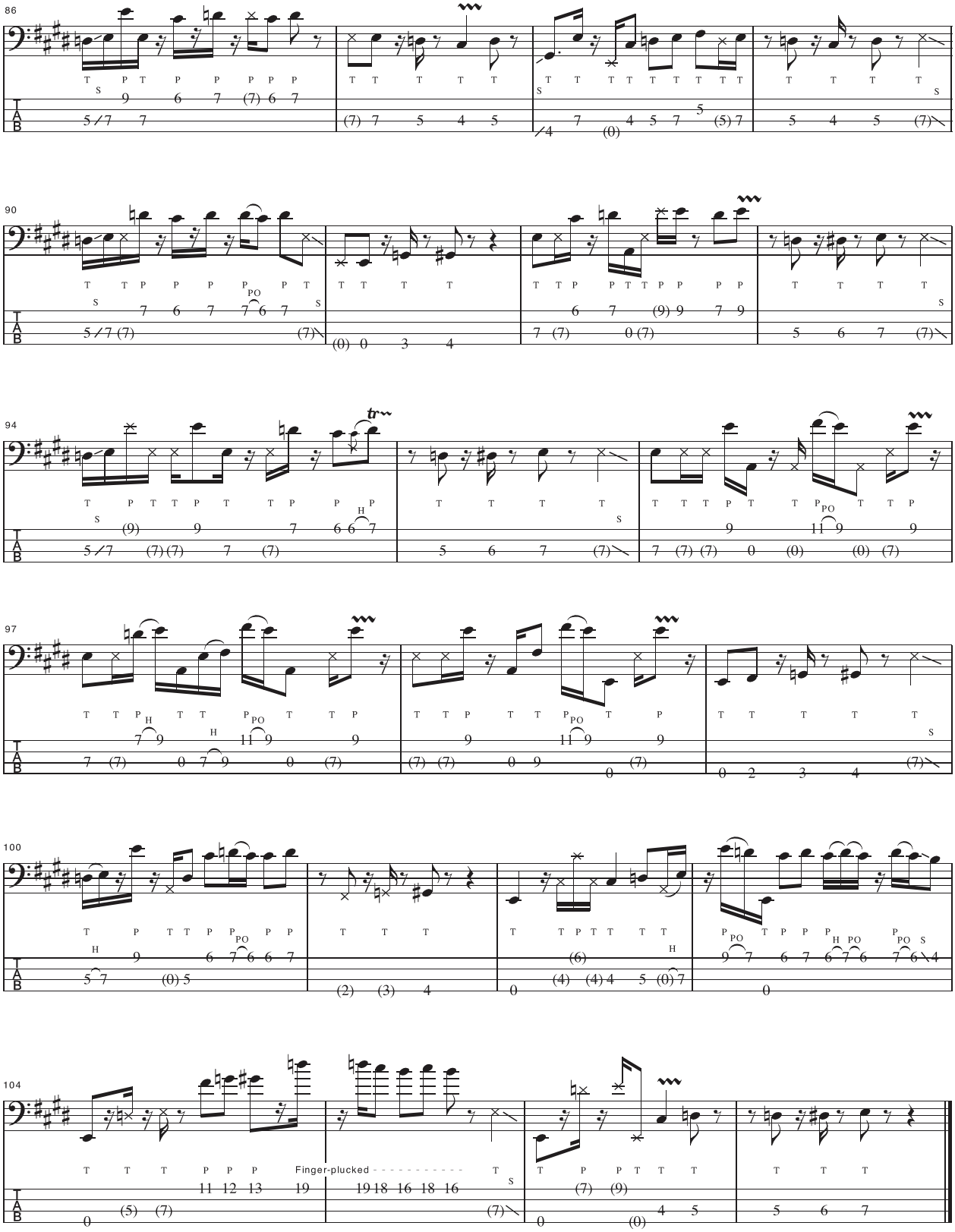
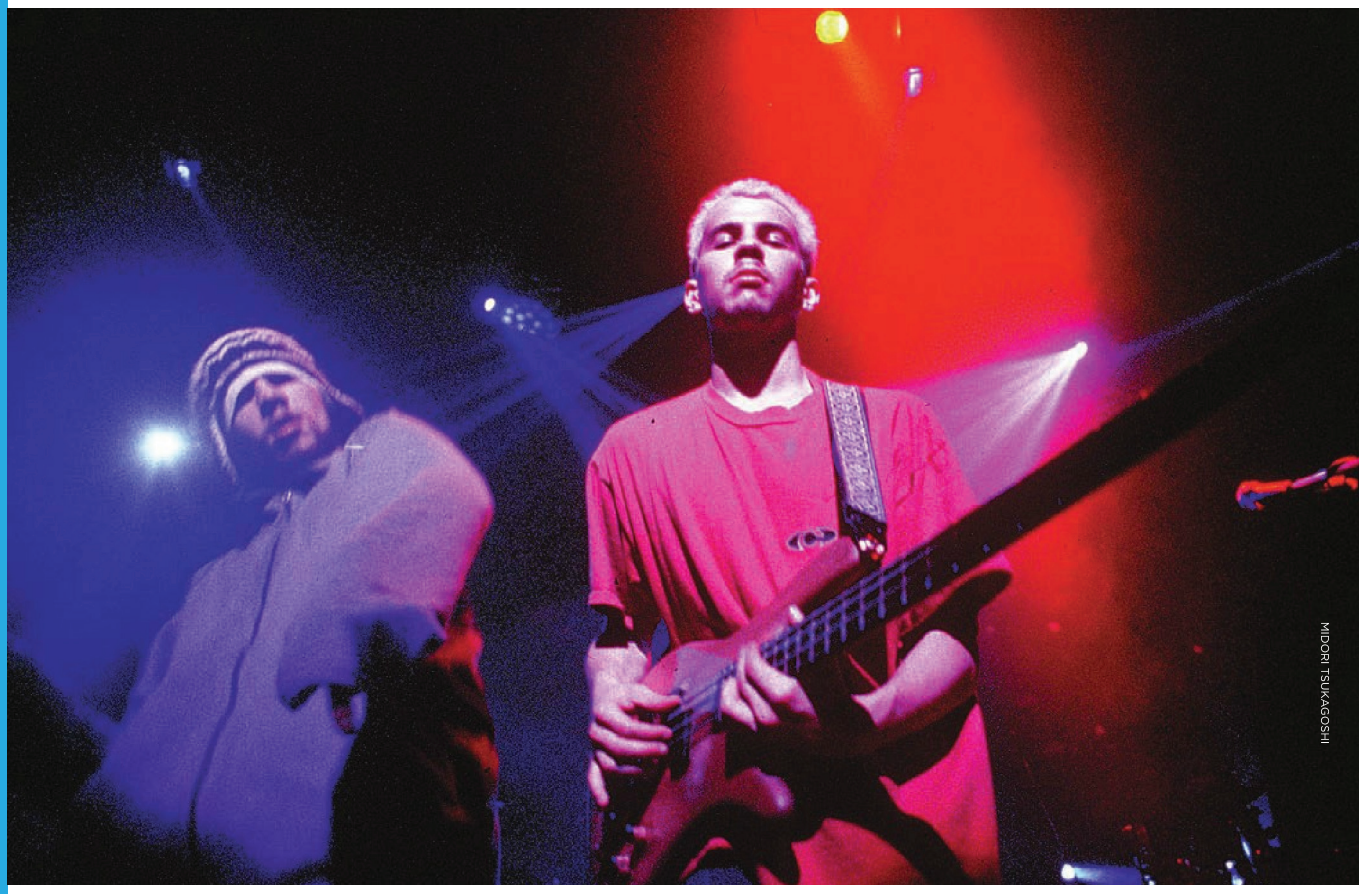



86
90
94
97
100
104
Finger-plucked



MIDORI TSUKAGOSHI

JAMIROQUAI'S "VIRTUAL INSANITY"

Stuart Zender's Complete Bass Line

BY BRYAN BELLER

FOR ALL THE TIMES MUSIC FANS AND musicians alike bemoan the lack of musical depth in chart-topping tunes, it's worth noting the happy exceptions to that perception. One such time was in 1997, when an eclectic group of young British funk disciples called Jamiroquai broke through with an irresistible international smash hit. Driven by jazzy piano chords, a cool-as-ice front-man vocal track, and a super-swinging rhythm section, the song "Virtual Insanity" suddenly took over the world. It swept that year's MTV video music awards (who can forget the groundbreaking "moving white floor in the hallway" video?), the album *Traveling Without Moving* went platinum and triple platinum in the U.S. and U.K. respectively, and Jamiroquai brought its version of uncompromisingly rich, jazzy, funky pop music to the masses.

The bass line, a virtuosic opus of both slap and fingerstyle funk, was played by the band's original bassist, the U.K.-born but Philadelphia-bred Stuart Zender. He was only 22 when he cut the track, and you can hear his youthful enthusiasm sprinkled all over the line; this was one occasion where

employing fills and chops in a funk tune really paid off. It's hard to imagine an older session cat going for some of the heavy lumber that Stuart laid down in the final chorus. But Zender's thoughtful application of techniques spoke volumes about the timeless nature of his groove.

Zender plays Warwick basses, and you can hear the thick, super-woody tone of his Stage I 5-string whether he's using his fingers or his thumb. The tune's mix is a little murky in spots, and while the groove never stops, a close listen leaves you wishing they left more sonic room for his ghost-note articulations. Take that under advisement as you read the transcription, but don't let it get in the way of tackling it—playing this tune is addictive!

Right from the very first notes, you know you're in for a ride. After laying out for the first verse, Zender comes flying in at bar 20 with an 18th-fret flurry that can be plucked, tapped, or slapped—your choice—before launching the chorus groove that shook a thousand '90s dance floors.

Zender's line works particularly well against the chords in the chorus (we're in *E♭* minor, a key that lends itself to some hairy accidentals, so heads up). It kicks off at bar 21 with a slap octave under *B* major, then swings to a *B♭7* with *D* in the bass. Zender anticipates that chord with an *A♭* 16th-note at the end of beat two, which sets up his *B♭* major arpeggio lick on the next beat. That lick ends on *D*, employing a nice upward-leading motion into the tune's root chord, *E♭m7*. The ascent continues with a new chord on every quarter-note of bar 22: *G♭*, *A♭m*, and *E♭m/B♭*. Zender plays a catchy, octave-driven slap-funk pattern underneath the climb and hits the final chord on the second 15th-note of beat four: there's your packed dance floor, ladies and gentlemen.

Stuart gives his thumb a rest for the verse, digging in with his fingers and locking in with the bass drum through the cyclical and equally rich chord structure (for extra credit, try figuring out the piano chord voicings by ear; they're awesome). The bar phrasing is key here, as you essentially have a three-bar pattern with a bar of 2/4 tacked onto the end as a turnaround. The first two of the three full bars (29 and 30) go from *E♭m7* to *A♭7*, and the phrase continues on the cycle-of-5ths path to *D♭7* and *G♭6*. Bar 31 is the beginning of the harmonic turnaround, with *Cdim* and *Bmaj7* splitting the bar and pointing down to the *B♭* augmented chord in the 2/4 bar. Through all this Zender keeps it pretty simple, using octaves and chromatically climbing into the second chord of bars 29 and 30, and not giving away the cut-bar's metric shift by staying consistent in bars 31 and 32. The overall result is a slick groove that never seems to resolve itself until the chorus comes around again.

That's the whole tune right there: verse and chorus, two different chord structures, two different bass lines, one fingerstyle and one slapped. But as the song progresses, Zender starts throwing in signature licks and fills, forever stamping the tune as his own. Check out the trills in the verse turnaround at bars 36, 40, and 44. That's *funky*. Then, in the second chorus at bar 49, he foreshadows the hairy 16th-note triplet slap fills coming down the pike.

Here's your challenge for the month: bars 52, 56, 76, and 80. They're all in the chorus, and all variations on Zender's propensity for slapped 16th-note triplets. He lays into them so powerfully that the rest of the band ultimately follows suit. Even the drummer's hi-hat pattern eventually goes along for the ride!

One final note for those who know the tune: that slap-sounding fill at the end of the breakdown—two bars before **F**, bar 67—is actually a guitar. I always thought it was a bass myself, but Stuart says he didn't do it, only re-entering at 68 for a greasy fingerstyle fill.

Citing influences like James Jamerson, Larry Graham, Verdine White, Stanley Clarke, Bootsy Collins, and Alphonso Johnson, the young Stuart Zender was a funk machine waiting to happen. Though Jamiroquai enthusiasts were already hip to him, "Virtual Insanity" widely cemented Zender's credentials as a young funk pioneer from that day forward. Since leaving Jamiroquai in 1998, he's worked with Lauryn Hill, D'Angelo, Stevie Wonder, and Amy Winehouse, among many others, and he's still very active as a player, singer/songwriter, and producer. Anyone who checks out the funk he brought to this tune can certainly see why. **BP**

STUART ZENDER ON "VIRTUAL INSANITY"

What instrument did you use to track "Virtual Insanity"? Do you recall the rig?
I used a Warwick Streamer Stage I 5-string with MEC pickups. The bass was recorded direct, and I also had a Mesa Boogie 4x10 with various mics on it.

How did you construct the groove and bass line?
We all used to jam in a room, and this tune was one of those jams. Like a lot of the bass lines I came up with, it was the first thing that came into my head. The first thing is usually the right thing. I left the beginning empty because I thought the bass it would have more of an impact coming in on the chorus. For the verse, my right hand dampened the strings, and I used my thumb and index finger to play octaves. I slapped on the chorus and used a lot of dampened triplets and glissandos for fills. I think some people thought it was the bass drum, but it was actually the bass. As for the groove, well, I guess that's in the heart.

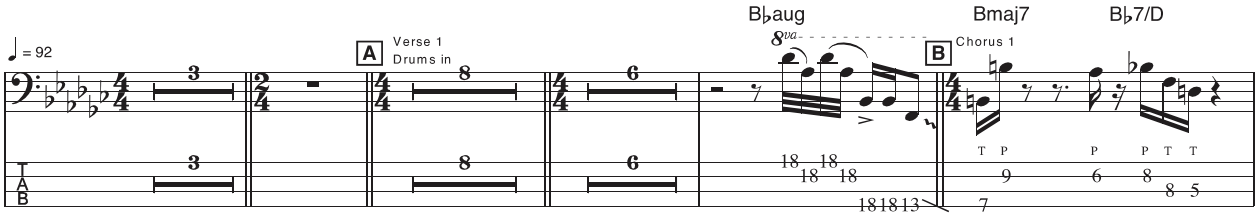
What was it like playing it live?
It was a joy to play live because of the two techniques I used—plus I love a good ol' triplet here and there. The groove that [drummer] Derrick McKenzie and I had was tight, and I loved locking in with him.

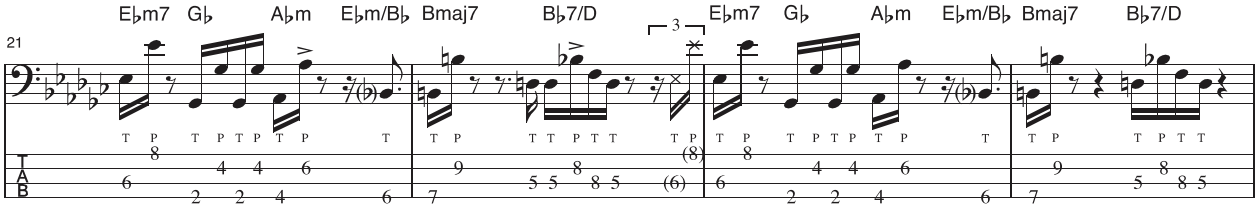
What does this song mean to you now, ten years on from its initial release?
It's funny how many people never listen to lyrics. The lyrics in the song were quite deep, yet the song had happy chords, so I guess it went over most people's heads. As for the music, Maroon 5 gave us the biggest compliment by using the essence of the song in one of theirs. Do you know which one? Ha ha. I don't like Mondays ... but I love Sunday mornings!

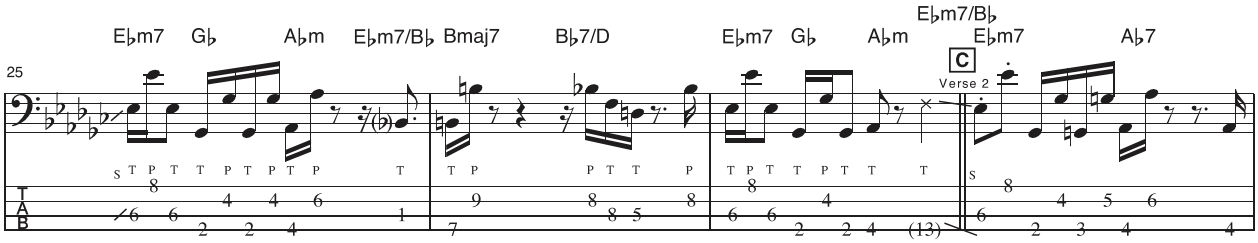
TRANSCRIPTION

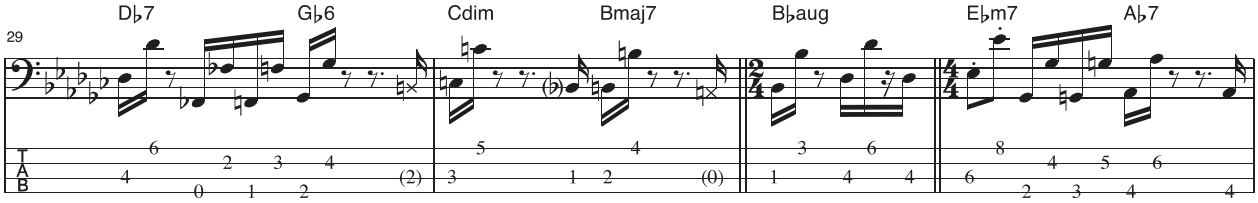
JAMIROQUAI "Virtual Insanity"

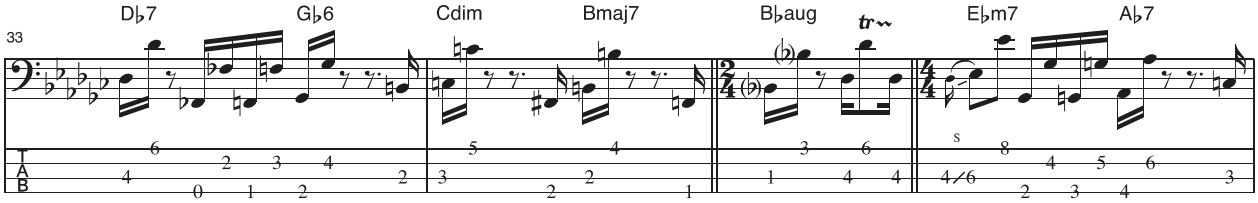
Transcription by Bryan Beller











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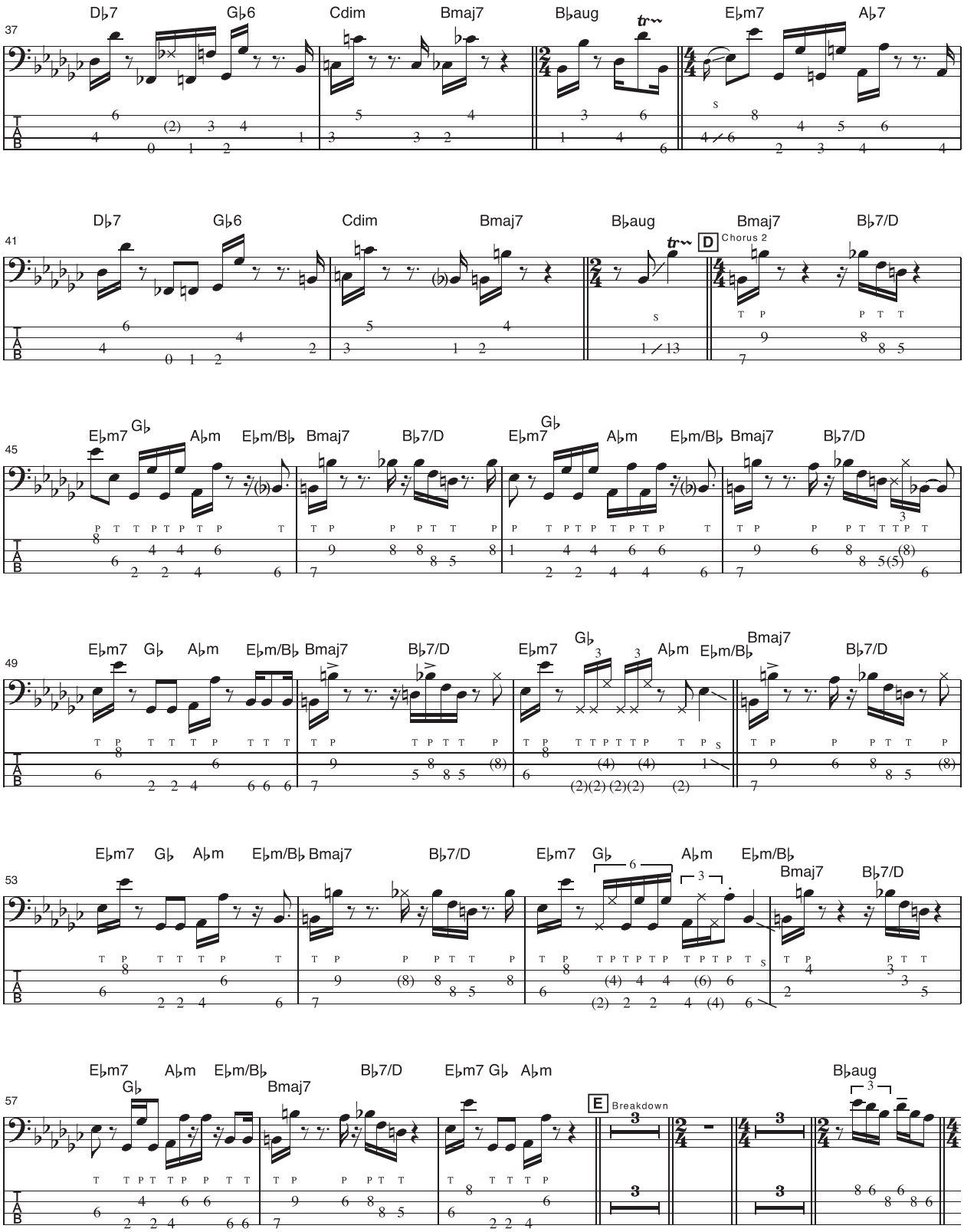

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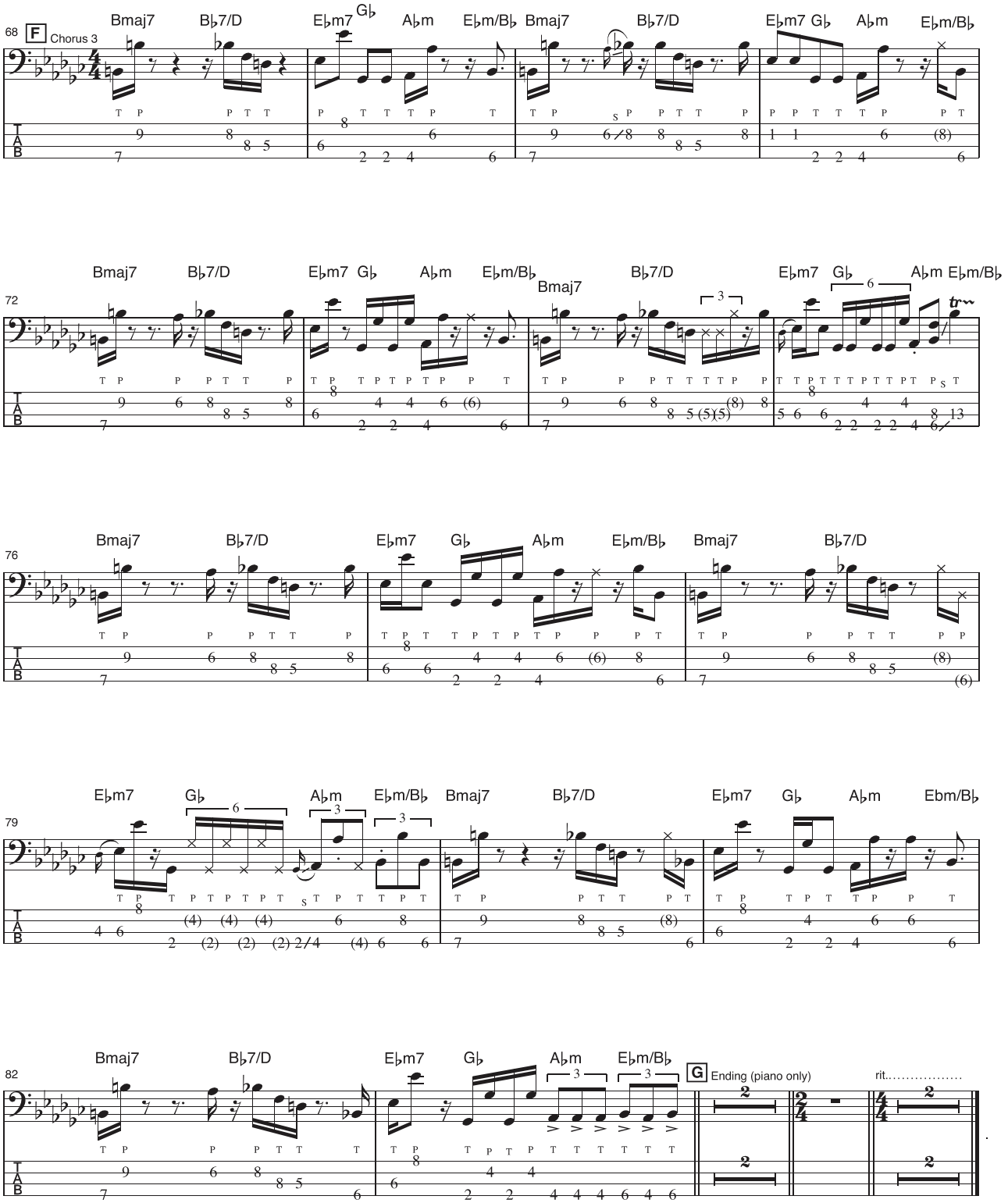

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